

South African Labour Bulletin

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South African Labour Bulletin

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The South African Labour Bulletin

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Published since April 1974.

Eight issues yearly. Guidelines for contributors and subscription form on back page.

The South African Labour Bulletin is a refereed journal.

The views expressed in the contributions are not necessarily those of the editorial board.

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Editorial note

Jabu Matiko has joined the staff of the Labour Bulletin as a researcher. Jabu previously worked for the Metal and Allied Workers Union as an organiser on the East Rand for the last three years.

Potentially the most important development in the trade union movement at the moment is COSATU's call for a national living wage campaign. Whilst this issue is mentioned in some of the articles in the present edition, the Bulletin will be monitoring the campaign on an ongoing basis in the future.

SARHWU: organising SATS workers

The following is an interview with members of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) at the Delmore hostel situated near Germiston. Workers are engaged in organizing other workers for the union. At present the management (South African Transport Services) is refusing to recognize the union. Shop-stewards and union officials have met with harassment and detentions after the union launched a campaign last year to get workers to resign from the management-created Black Staff Association.

Despite this the organizing campaign is still on. At Delmore attempts are not only made at the worksphere, workers are also organized at the homesphere - in this case in the hostel provided by SATS. Workers interviewed are not only members of the recruiting committee, but also form part of the Delmore hostel executive committee established to struggle against bad living conditions.

At present the compound manager uses compound security guards who guard the hostel. Their primary task is to check who gets in and out of the hostel, around the clock. All hostel inmates are supposed to have their hostel permits to gain access. In the past (this has stopped since the inception of the hostel committee) hostel dwellers were forced to spend the night at the Delmore railway station waiting rooms if they failed to produce their hostel permits. Visitors are not allowed. A loudhailer is usually used to call out those who have visitors, and the meeting place is outside the hostel.

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So far a boycott over the poor quality of food has been organised and at present workers are preparing food for themselves in their rooms. When asked about the significance of the boycott, the local organizer, Mnyamezeni Bwoi, said, "The boycott has unified workers in the hostel, this has resulted in the growth of SARHWU membership in the Delmore area. Workers have begun to identify sites of struggle other than the worksphere; they have confronted SATS functionaries who are exercising control over the hostel inmates. The crucial lesson here has been the connection of SATS management attempts to destroy worker organization and hostel administrators total rejection of worker's attempts to have control over their lives. SARHWU has a hostel committee in Kaserne and New Canada, attempts are still being made to have such committees all over the country where SARHWU is organizing. At this stage coordination is the responsibility of the regional committee of SARHWU. The REC is composed of 10 workers elected from the regional congress and one paid official who is regional secretary."

The interview below was conducted before the outbreak of widespread strike action during March-April initiated from the City Deep depot

SALB: How did you first get to know about SARHWU?

SARHWU members: Last year during May we got pamphlets at Germiston station stating there was a big rally at Orlando stadium; whereby workers will be celebrating May Day. We also learnt from the pamphlet that personalities like Winnie Mandela and Elijah Barayi will be giving speeches. We attended this rally and learnt a lot. Workers songs were sung and speeches were given as the pamphlet stated. On returning to the hostel we found that most workers were at the rally during the day, most have stayed away from work. On that night the dining hall was not characterised by eating and drinking sorghum beer. Workers were singing what they heard at the rally. The next day we went to the COSATU offices in Germiston to find out if railway workers had a union. We were introduced to an organiser of SARHWU. He discussed with us all we wanted to know about SARHWU, afterwards we joined. The organiser told us to introduce other workers to SARHWU as this would make it a powerful union. We took some joining forms back and started organizing at work and at the hostel.

SALB: How did you do this?

SARHWU members: After work, most workers spent time at the hostel's beerhall as there is nothing else to do, except sleep. Our energy was concentrated in this beerhall. We used to go there and started singing worker songs. People would join in the singing but others would stop and ask what all these songs meant. Discussion would take place, in fact, within three days we had already recruited 12 workers, and today membership is approximately 4,000 out of 7,000 hostel residents. More work is still to be done.

SALB: Tell us how you organized at work. Did you face any problems?

SARHWU members: Recruiting at work was difficult due to the way management has organized our work. We don't spend most of our time together. We are doing different jobs and in small numbers, except workers maintaining the railway tracks and electric cables, but even then we did not have contacts in those sections. The other problem was management imposed the Staff Association which pretended it represents the interest of workers, and due to the absence of an alternative organization in the past it was difficult for workers to believe that SARHWU was different from the Staff Association.

SALB: How are living conditions at the hostel?

SARHWU members: At present there are 7,000 inmates at Delmore. They are divided in three kinds of sleeping quarters; those that accommodate 54 workers, 25 workers and the last one accommodates 4 workers. In these rooms there is nothing except one big stove and beds that are made up of iron and wires used as a mattress spring. There is one big kitchen where SATS has employed people to cook for us. There are monthly deductions made on our wages for food and accommodation. Deductions range from R39 to R59 maximum. Toilets are unhygienic and we are not supplied with hot water at the showers. In short, conditions are really bad.

SALB: Do you ever discuss this with workers?

SARHWU members: We do, in fact our discussion on living conditions has made us successful in recruiting new members for the union, and this was as a result of the hostel committee which was formed by union members to struggle for better living conditions.

SALB: How was the committee elected, how is it struggling for better living conditions?

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SARHWU members: On 10 September 1986 unionised workers decided to form a hostel committee. This took place at the union offices. Ten workers were elected as office bearers.

SALB: Didn't the absence of non-union members create problems for the committee? How did they respond to the committee? Do you think ten workers are enough to represent 7,000 workers?

SARHWU members: This section of workers never presented problems. They agreed with us that living conditions were bad and something had to be done. Their response to our general meetings held at the hostel was positive. We have problems with the number of committee members, but workers agreed that it should continue as temporary. This was after the compound manager heard about it. When we first met with him to introduce it, it was presented as a committee that was going to curb crime, gambling and indiscipline in the hostel. The compound manager was never told about bad living conditions and how workers felt about them. The committee was welcomed on this basis, and the compound manager suggested that only 10 workers make up this committee. Workers agreed to this proposal, but what the committee did was different from what the authorities were expecting.

SALB: How was it different?

SARHWU members: Our first activity centred around organizing workers as members of SARHWU. We did at times deal with crime. We felt organizing workers into SARHWU we had to develop understanding amongst them. We had to show them that it is SATS who creates problems which they were confronted with. The main issue we focused on to develop this understanding was the bad quality of food.

On 8 November 1986 a general meeting was called by the committee. The compound manager was also invited to this meeting. Workers grievances about the living conditions were raised; the question of food was also included. The compound manager's response was that he was going to raise those grievances at a top management meeting and feedback would be made on 1 December 1986. After he left the meeting, the committee requested workers to stay. This opportunity was used to explain further about SARHWU and the need to join hands together, union pamphlets were also distributed.

SALB: What were the developments afterwards?

SARHWU members: The compound manager never fulfilled his promise. His attitude to the committee changed. He claimed it was consisting of union instigators. Following that one of the committee members was evicted from the hostel. Workers response to this development was a boycott of food. A demand that monthly deductions be stopped was made. Failure of the compound manager to do this was met with workers anger, the kitchen was looted, and authorities responded by closing it down.

SALB: How did you view the closing down of the kitchen?

SARHWU members: To us it meant the authorities were not prepared to address themselves to our problem. To force them to do so a decision was taken by workers that expired meal tickets should not be handed in for a renewal. This meant the struggle had to continue. And it did. The authorities solution was to send in dogs and police at the hostel to pressurise them to hand in the meal tickets. Only 55 workers responded to the authorities call. On 19 February 1986 the whole committee was called to the Germiston charge office, where they were questioned for one day in connection with the food boycott. After their release a meeting called at the hostel was interfered with by the police who told workers that they were not against SARHWU, every worker who wants to join can do so. Nothing was said about the living conditions in the hostel. As far as the workers are concerned the struggle still continues.

Developments since the interview

On 25 February 1987, the committee met the compound manager and other officials from SATS. The meeting was to discuss the food boycott and bad living conditions in the hostel. Committee members claimed; "before the meeting could address itself to the agenda, SATS officials asked what position did we hold in our respective jobs. They expressed surprise after finding out that all committee members were so called "labourers". They asked how do workers who are regarded as "staff" think about us. We told them in the hostel workers don't regard themselves different from others because they happen to be called differently at work. All are concerned about the material conditions in the hostel." On the question of living conditions, the committee requested the officials to go into the hostel and observe themselves. This took place, but the officials said there was nothing they could do. They were going to report-back to their superiors. Nevertheless they asked the committee if

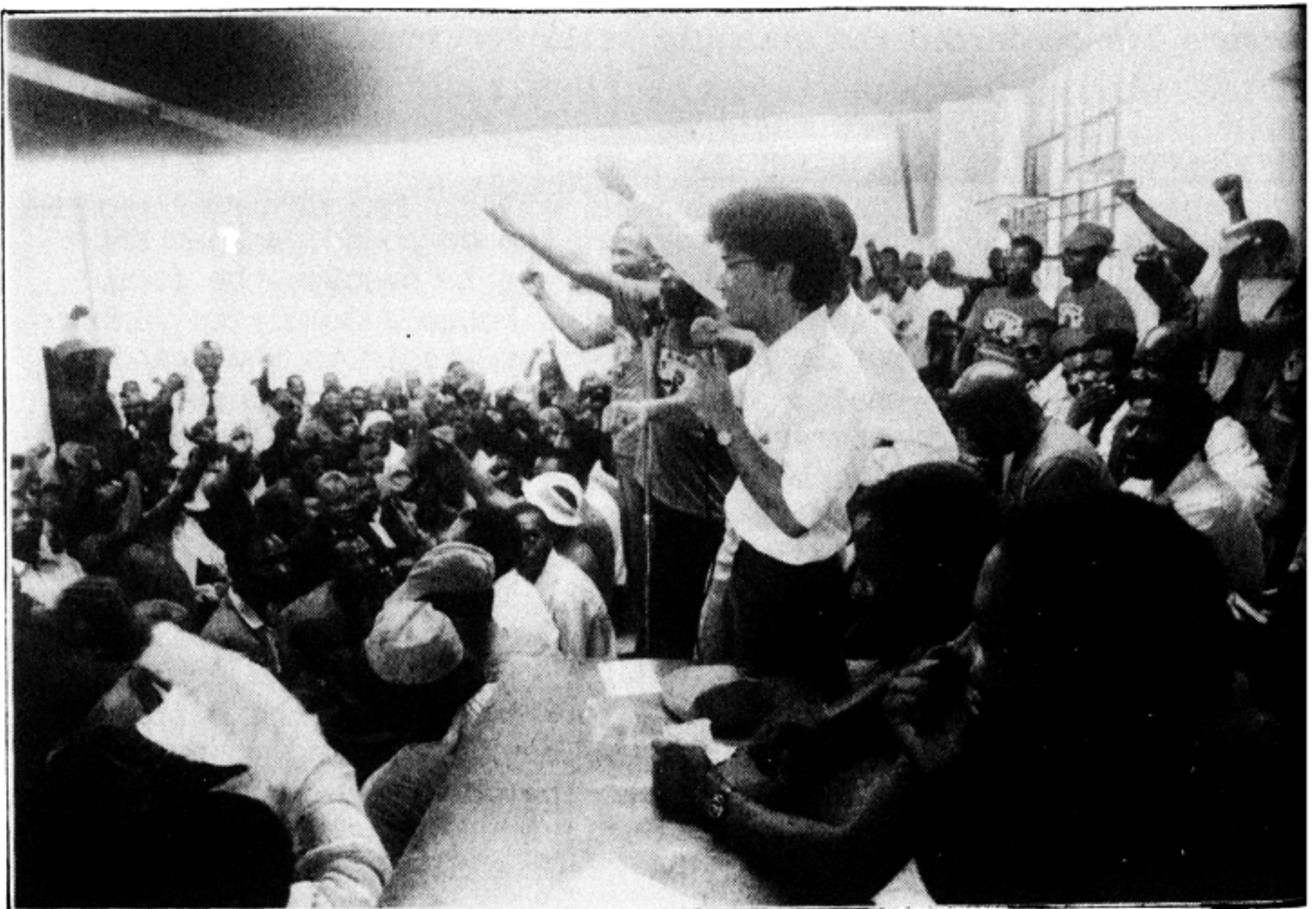
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it would be accepted by workers to renovate the hostel and re-arrange it in such a way that people stay according to the job they do, that is , drivers should occupy their rooms separately. The committee rejected the proposal. Jeff Majiyezi's negative response is summed up this way; "They want to divide us according to our jobs. If we agree our structures will be weakened, workers will begin to see themselves as different interest groups." The next meeting for a report-back from S.A.T.S. is scheduled for 25 March 1987.

SARHWU rallies its forces

The campaign against bad quality of food and living conditions in the SATS hostels took a new step when SARHWU called a rally at the COSATU hall in Johannesburg on March 8 1987. Workers from Witbank, Pretoria, East Rand, West Rand and Vaal attended. Approximately 1,000 workers were present. "The economy is in our hands. Without us nothing will move", said Justice Langa, the president of SARHWU.

photo: Marcel Golding of NUM addressing SARHWU workers (Afrapix)



"Workers must unite themselves. The system is forcing them to do so. They must realise they are mostly exploited, and as migrants; who are politically oppressed; are locked in the hostels while young and active in SATS activities, and thrown out to the homelands when old and incapable to work. This we must change. We must not only fight at work, our hostels should also be centres of struggle."



photo: railway workers at March 8 rally at COSATU House (Afrapix)

Areas that have already established hostel committees which are presently involved in the food boycott are Delmore, Kaserne, New Canada, Central Rand in Benoni and Lanwen in Krugersdorp. Jeff Majiyezi; a member of the Delmore hostel committee emphasised the need to go back and organise other hostels, "we must go further and unite all committees. If anything happens to any worker in the hostels, we must all take action he said. A resolution was taken that all hostel committees should meet and discuss the present struggle over the food boycott. Whatever decision is taken must be

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reported to all hostels, and concensus must be reached before action can be taken.

One of the issues that dominated the rally was the migrant labour system. Paul Nkuna, the COSATU Wits regional chairman, said the migrant labour system deprives workers of any future. It breaks up their families. Workers are forced to spend most of their time in hostels. They only visit their homes once a year. He further stressed the need for unity in the railway sector and in COSATU. He said, "It is through unity in struggle that the present system can be crushed." The experiences of mine workers - as migrants - were also related to the rally. A NUM speaker, Marcel Golding, said miners had decided 1987 should be the year to take over the hostels, and not to renovate them, but to destroy them, to destroy the compound system.

The SATS Staff Association was also at the centre of discussion. Workers asserted that these associations were management imposed to control them. A decision was therefore taken that 15 March 1987 be a deadline for SATS to stop deducting 50c for their membership fee to the Black Staff Association. May Day and June 16 were declared workers holiday, all railway workers are supposed to observe these days despite SATS non-recognition. Workers also resolved to take industrial action if the state continues detain- ing leadership in SARHWU.

Wages were also a matter of concern. A worker related the follow- ing experience; "You can work for 20 years, but still you will earn as little as R480 per month." A resolution was taken that this issue should be dealt with together with other unions in the COSATU living wage campaign.

(All report on railway struggles by Jabu Matiko, March 1987)

Strike at City Deep

The rally held on March 8 1987 marked the growing militancy of SARHWU members, despite the fact that SATS refuses to recognise their union. SARHWU called a further meeting of all Transvaal shop-stewards to discuss the City Deep (a container depot) dispute between workers and SATS over the dismissal of a driver, Mr Andrew Nendzanda for alleged "cash irregularities". (He arrived back at the depot on a Friday night too late to deposit his receipts, which was only done on the following Monday.) SATS workers were demanding the unconditional re-instatement of their colleague. SATS management was offering to re-instate the driver on the condition that he paid an R80 fine. This meeting - held on March 21 1987 - was attended by more than 4,000 railway workers. Hundreds of police gathered for the whole day outside COSATU House monitoring the situation. At the end of the meeting police ordered workers to use only one route, ie. via End Street, to walk to Doornfontein Station. Workers were to leave in groups of twenty guarded by armed policemen.

At the meeting SARHWU members resolved to take action if SATS failed to resolve the City Deep dispute by March 23 1987. Workers in all Transvaal depots and stations where SARHWU is organised would clock-in but would not work if the City Deep workers' demands were not met. According to SARHWU, SATS' approach to industrial relations has lead to more conflict. SATS has refused to talk to the union even though the majority of workers on strike were SARHWU members. "This type of "kragtadig" attitude to industrial relations has long been rejected by all except the most backward of companies", said a union spokesperson.

The kragtadig attitude was confirmed when SATS failed to resolve the issue. Workers demands were as follows:

1. Unconditional re-instatement of their colleague.
2. Full payment of the days that they have not been physically involved in their normal work procedure.
3. That in future all disciplinary matters taken against workers, should be made open for assessment by the workers.
4. Involvement of workers in all forums that are involved in decision making on the future of workers.
5. That all racist practices in management machinery be

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abolished.

6. Workers should have freedom of expressing their opinions in an open meeting sanctioned by management without prejudice or in intimidation from any member of management.

On March 23 1987 workers in depots and railway stations took solidarity action with their City Deep colleagues. Among the bigger centres hit by the strike were Germiston, Boksburg East, Braamfontein, Vereeniging and Standerton. According to the union 8,000 workers were involved on March 25 and the figure rose to 16,000 on March 27 (and over 20,000 by the first week of April). SATS response has been to apply for a court interdict to stop workers from disrupting operations at the City Deep depot. The Minister of Transport, Mr Eli Louw, published a special government gazette giving SATS management the right to dismiss the strikers without notice. In addition the SATS management published a notice to all workers, pointing out that workers had contravened Section 26(1) of the Conditions of Employment (SATS) Act No.16 of 1983. According to this act, "No employee or other persons shall instigate a strike, or incite any employee to take part in a strike or in the continuation of a strike". In terms of this act any employee who partakes in a strike could be regarded as having terminated his service with SATS. In addition to the notice, a comic-strip leaflet condemning SARHWU and recommending the Black Transport Union (BLATU) was distributed; BLATU is presently the company-recognised union but is regarded as a "dummy union" by the majority of workers. In fact on March 27 1987 Mr Mathoha, BLATU's General Secretary, was reported as warning his members to go back to work as his union had no "strike clause" in its agreement signed in 1981 with SATS. Nevertheless workers continued with the strike.

SATS claimed it was losing R500,000 a day at City Deep. The Transvaal regional manager was reported as saying SATS was unable to meet nearly 500 requests from firms for empty containers. At one stage there were 751 containers at the terminal waiting to be delivered. A further 458 which could not be off-loaded were still on trains at City Deep. In addition there was a shortage of empty coaches, as others were all occupied by undelivered cargo. Companies were taking delivery of the goods from railway trucks using their own work-force as white scabs employed by SATS could not cope on their own. But despite this SATS refused to meet with SARHWU. Meetings that have been taking place were between BLATU and workers elected by strikers, but a meeting scheduled for March

24 failed after management refused to talk because of the presence of SARHWU shop-stewards.

The outcome of the meeting held on March 25 led to the revision of demands by workers. Management had demanded that workers go back to work and that the General Manager should investigate the driver's case, and if not found guilty workers would be paid for the time they have spent not working. Workers rejected this settlement, and revised their demands as follows.

"As a result of discussions with the City Deep workers - and representatives of workers from other workplaces who are in solidarity with us, the following are our revised positions - which were formulated in a spirit of reconciliation and compromise:

- (a) The correction of the irregularity whereby Andrew Nendzanda was found guilty on appeal, of the alternative charge. This will amount to the original demand of unconditional reinstatement of Andrew Nendzanda.
- (b) A clear statement of intent to eliminate racism anywhere and everywhere in SATS - and the establishment of the appropriate grievance machinery to deal with complaints in this regard.
- (c) No person shall be singled out for any disciplinary action arising out of this work stoppage.
- (d) Full payment for the time that we were not working. The reason for this is that we feel that this whole matter could have been solved on the first day if management had been reasonable - so the time spent not working was not due to us, but to their intransigence.

IF THESE FOUR DEMANDS ARE MET THEN THE WORKFORCE WILL RETURN TO WORK - subject to a negotiating team, which, on the workers side, will consist of representatives elected specifically for this task, commencing negotiations immediately on the following points:

- (i) That the disciplinary code should be redrafted by the joint negotiating committee, or a subcommittee thereof, in order to eliminate contradictions, inconsistencies, and to provide for a fairer procedure.
- (ii) The creation of a more efficient and a more democratic structure through which workers can make management aware of

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- their feelings about any issue in which they are interested.
- (iii) That workers are not precluded from approaching management at the highest levels, simply because they are not members - or feel their interests not to be represented by - a recognised union within SATS.

In order to facilitate this task as quickly and democratically as possible, workers must be afforded the opportunity to elect their representatives to this negotiating team before returning to work. This will ensure that workers return to work with the confidence that their problems will be dealt with by their democratically elected representatives. This will speed up the process of resolving all outstanding problems."

Solidarity

As the dispute deepens, the National Union of Railway Workers expressed solidarity with the strikers. On March 24 delegations from NURW, SARHWU and African Railway and Harbour Workers Union met to discuss the strike, and questions of solidarity and unity in action. Workers united in action motivated the meeting between these unions despite their different positions. COSATU also called for help to end the SATS strike. The Federation (SARHWU is an affiliate) warned SATS about the dangers of resorting to mass dismissals: failure to resolve the dispute would fuel tension and conflict in the factories and townships.

At the time of going to print the strike was still on. Negotiations between workers representatives who are members of SARWHU and SATS have deadlocked. SATS has installed white employees in some of the areas affected by the strike, eg. ticket examiners in Johannesburg and Langlaagte were reported to have been replaced by white SATS employees. In Johannesburg only white sections of the station were cleaned by white scabs. A threat has also been issued to dismiss the strikers.

(Jabu Matiko, March 1987)

The following comic strip pamphlet was distributed to railway workers in an attempt to undermine SARHWU's growing support.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

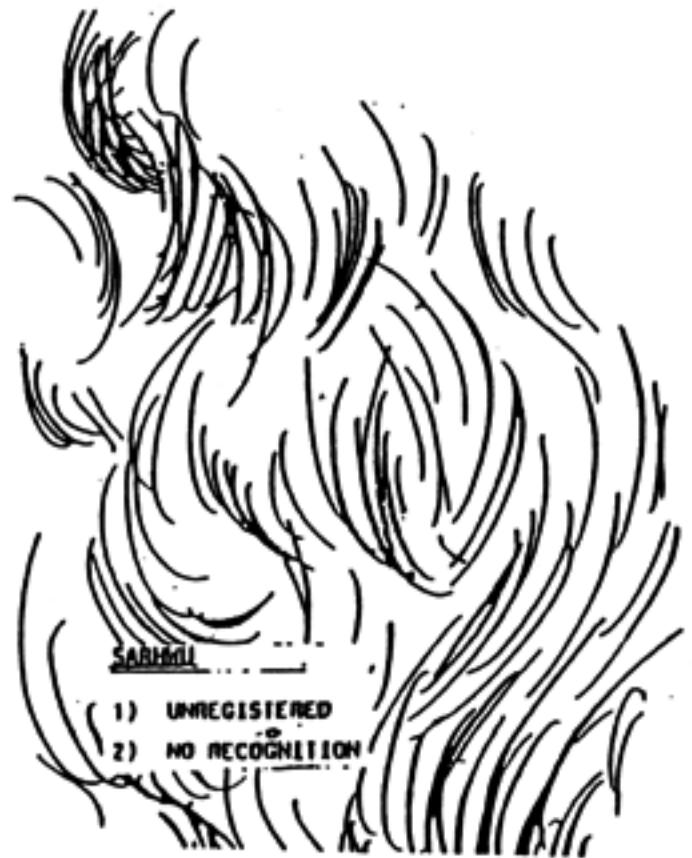
BLATU



BLACK TRADE UNION OF SATS

- 1) REGISTERED
- 2) GRANTED RECOGNITION BY THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AFFAIRS
- 3) 61 000 MEMBERS

SARHWU



SARHWU

- 1) UNREGISTERED
- 2) NO RECOGNITION

BLATU: PROGRESS, PARITY AND UPLIFTMENT THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS

SARHWU: DESTRUCTION THROUGH STRIKES



DO NOT BE MISLED: SUPPORT BLATU: THE TRADE UNION THROUGH AND FOR THE TRANSPORT WORK

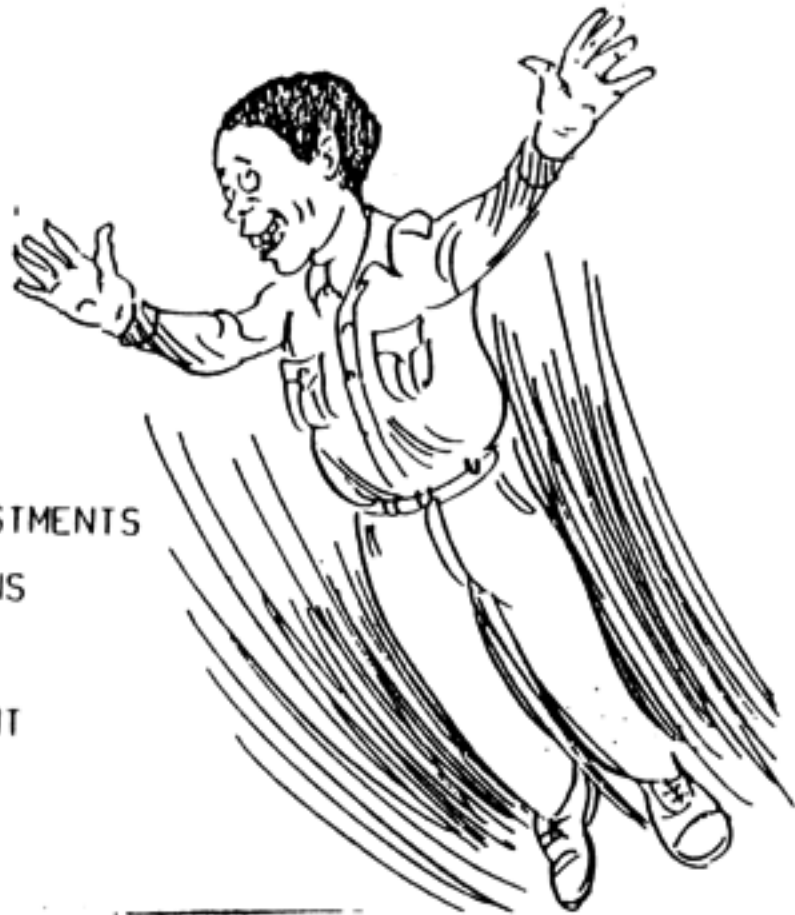
SARHWU: DESTRUCTION

BLATU : IMPROVEMENTS

PROGRESSED A LONG WAY DURING HARD BARGAINING WITH MINISTER AND MANAGEMENT ON A NUMBER OF VERY IMPORTANT ISSUE. ANNOUNCEMENTS WILL BE MADE BY BLATU IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.



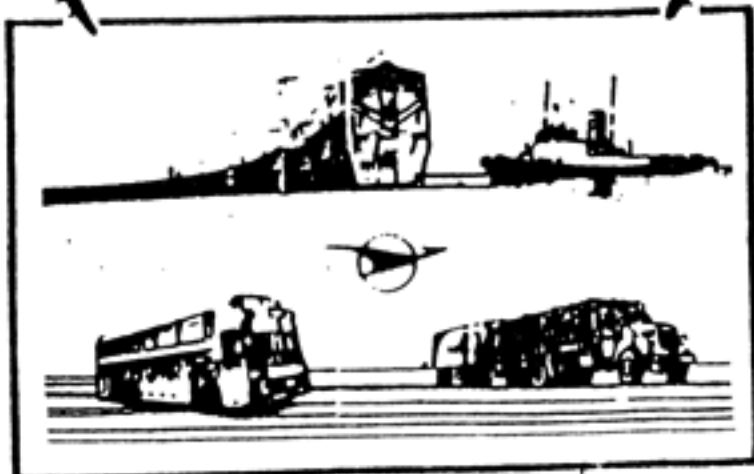
STRIKES STRIKES..
DISMISSALS UNEMPLOYMENT
LOSS OF HOUSES POVRTY
MISERY HUNGER



- a) EMPLOYMENT
- b) SECURITY
- c) ADVANCEMENT
- d) SALARY ADJUSTMENTS
- e) HOUSING LOANS
- f) ASSISTANCE
- g) REINSTATEMENT

BLATU:

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT



SARHWU : NO FUTURE

PREVENT SELF-DESTRUCTION - GO BACK TO WORK

Metalworkers win 6 months paid maternity

Workers in the metal industry have scored a major victory after they won six months paid maternity leave at national level. It is the first time that maternity rights have been won across an entire industry. Agreement has been reached with SEIFSA, the metal employers association, for both pay and job security for six months for women going on confinement. The parties have now requested that the agreement be sent to the Minister of Manpower for gazetting. The parties are requesting that the agreement be extended to non-parties within the industry.

According to the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) this victory comes in the wake of a huge campaign around maternity rights in 1986. Pamphlets explaining the union's position were distributed at all factories, and discussions around women's demands were held. Two Transvaal shop-stewards councils were held specifically on this issue. During the 1986 negotiations MAWU's demand for "six months paid maternity" was strongly supported by the other metal unions, particularly those under the South African Council of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF). The parties at the Industrial Council agreed to settle pay and leave separately.

Pay

During the talks MAWU demanded that women should get pay for six months under the established Sick Pay Fund. This fund had originally provided for three months pay for women going on confinement. Many metal workers however were not even aware of the fund as they simply continued to withdraw money from the government Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). SEIFSA eventually conceded to the unions' demands for additional payment. The position is as follows:

- * A woman must be employed by a SEIFSA company in order to qualify.
- * She must have contributed to the fund for at least two years.
- * She must not have claimed for more than one pregnancy in the past, ie. there is a maximum of two claims per woman.
- * If the above conditions are met, the woman will receive payment for 26 weeks, the amount calculated according to the workers wage.

Workers in the lowest earning category, R114 per week and lower, will receive R50 each week for the six month period. Workers in the highest earning bracket, over R287 per week, will receive R114

- maternity -

each week while on confinement. Taken together with UIF payments the agreement means that a woman will receive at least three months leave with payment close to her full salary. According to the union, it is now up to the plant level negotiators to bargain to make up the difference.

Leave

The principle of job security was established early in the negotiations. Employers however wanted women to resign and then be re-employed when they came back. At first even the request for a six month leave period was strongly resisted. After some struggle the unions accepted the idea of "re-employment", but important protections were added. There are special protections for leave and leave bonus pay. Employers have also undertaken that a woman returning from confinement will be taken back in the same or a similar job. Women on maternity leave will be entitled to any increases which have been awarded nationally, and will not be prejudiced for purposes of promotion and/or merit increases. Employers have also undertaken to sign a written guarantee of re-employment which will be given to the worker from the date on which leave is taken, and which will clearly state any benefits she is entitled to under the Sick Pay Fund or any other Fund. All relevant claim forms must be handed to the worker. Management has agreed to a form of job security for workers employed for under two years. These workers will be given preference when they re-apply for their jobs. The agreement allows employers to seek temporary replacement workers whilst women are on leave. MAWU is now encouraging plant level negotiators to ask that women be allowed to find their own replacements, or alternatively that workers previously retrenched from the company be given these temporary jobs.

The union has also reluctantly accepted, in principle, that a woman on maternity leave may be retrenched, provided that she would have qualified for retrenchment anyway. It is also agreed that in any retrenchment programme temporary workers will be fired first.

The metal workers' victory must be assessed in terms of the nature of the metal industry and the stubborn resistance from employers united in the employers association to concede to maternity rights up until now. In the 1987 demands MAWU has taken the battle for maternity rights a step forward by including an additional demand for 14 days paid paternity leave after the birth of the baby.

Lessons of the OK strike

This years living wage campaign got off to a fighting start with Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) major wage victory at OK bazaars. As the power struggle between the union and management stretched out over ten bitter weeks a number of factors have been highlighted. The union has been able to reassert its power at a particularly difficult time. Increased state repression, the detention of shop-stewards, and severe limitations on workers right to picket, or to move aggressively to directly affect OK sales, makes the victory at OK Bazaars of particular significance. Workers have shown their determination to hold out in spite of repression, and despite managements enormous financial backing and their obvious hope that workers would eventually be starved into submission. CCAWUSA says that the union has now been able to break through a tradition of bad wages and poor labour relations at OK. Within the retail sector, OK has a tradition of being the worst employer, they have a higher record of unfair dismissals, backdoor retrenchments in spite of prior agreements with the union on this issue, and victimisation of union members. Breaking this down, according to CCAWUSA, sets an important precedent in terms of the unions dealings with other employers in the retail sector.

The strike is also notable for its broader implications. The outcome of the strike became a focus of attention for both employers in general and other unions. Within the community the strike provided a focus for mass mobilisation and practical involvement at a time when the state had clamped down on other campaigns and there was a general lull in political activity. The strike also brought together a number of unions, with both COSATU and CUSA-AZACTU together with a number of independents coming out in solidarity with the OK workers. CCAWUSA says that this kind of unified and co-ordinated response, the fact that organisations and union groupings have been able to transcend political and organisational differences for the sake of advancing worker struggles, was of crucial importance and should mark a turning point in the struggle. "We think this attitude, an open approach to all expressions of solidarity, was very important - and it has paid dividends. As a direct result of this outlook we were able to pressurize management with the help of numerous unions also connected to the Anglo-American structure". (1)

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For the OK workers the political lessons of the strike have been vital. Battle lines are now clearly being drawn. Managements resistance to the strike, their open collusion with the police at a number of stores, and various insidious strike-breaking tactics employed have once again demonstrated to workers the hypocrisy of their bosses. Many of the retail employers are well known for their anti-apartheid sentiments: "Anglo-American, through South African Breweries, and Premier Milling own many shares in the OK. We are tired of their hypocrisy. They visit the ANC in Lusaka and then come home to crush legal strikes", said one angry shop-steward. (2) According to the union, "bitter experience has spurred workers to a greater understanding of the objectives of the workers struggle. Increasingly workers are beginning to see that their struggle is not against racial discrimination only, but it is also a struggle for socialist democracy. We are struggling against exploitation of the work-force." (3) CCAWUSA has also been able to employ time during the strike on programmes highlighting the struggles of workers in other countries. Video's, slide-tape shows and seminars were held at various centres around the country.

The final settlement saw wage increases jump from an average of around R230 per month to R400 per month as from November this year. OK has agreed to pay R100 across the board increase (the union's original demand was for R160) in installments of R50 in April and November. Management has also given an undertaking to bring the minimum wage at all OK stores to R400 by November. The staff discount, an important issue for many of the workers, has increased from 10% to 12%. The settlement also resulted in reinstatement for 364 of the 510 dismissed workers. The rest are to await the outcome of arbitration which begins on 30 March. Some of the workers have been in detention at the time of settlement. All priviledged leave forfeited as a result of participation in the strike is to be reinstated. OK has also agreed to make available staff loans for workers. All goods repossessed by the company during the strike are to be returned to the workers. The settlement includes workers in the 'homelands' and women on maternity leave.

The South African Labour Bulletin went to speak to CCAWUSA on a number of issues related to the strike. Union organisers, and officials who participated in the discussion put forward their perceptions of the strike.

Managements resistance

The union feels strongly that OK wanted to set a precedent in how to deal with organised labour. Management's resistance to the strike, which took the form of a combination of measures which included state repression, was carefully monitored by other companies. This could be seen in the high profile media coverage of the strike and the outcome of every round of negotiations. We are also aware that definite discussions around the implications of the strike were held throughout the Anglo-American hierarchy. It is clear that management, through their linkages with Anglo and the vast financial backing available to them were willing to hold out until workers could be starved into submission. There is no doubt that the hire-purchase scheme at OK stores figured in their calculations. OK has an elaborate hire-purchase scheme which generally ties workers to the company. It is not surprising at all for workers to come home with an empty pay packet, since they also shop at the outlets where they work. Management thus foresaw that workers would begin to bend as they could not meet their financial obligations to the company. Management miscalculated on that score however, despite numerous repossessions, some of which the union was able to challenge in court, workers continued their action.

The company also tried to drain the union through costly legal battles. This strategy worked jointly with state clampdowns on the strikers. Over 1,000 workers were detained during the course of the strike, it cost the union R100,000 in bail money to release some of these workers. Although publicly OK would not admit this they obviously felt that the State of Emergency and constraints placed on organised labour would make things more difficult for the union and the workers. This also did not work in spite of tremendous harassment of pickets, dismissals and numerous contraventions of municipal by-laws, etc.

Management also clearly thought that mass dismissals at some stores would frighten the other workers. Dismissals were usually carried out under management's unilaterally imposed "rules of conduct" during a strike. These rules of conduct are very stringent and are all-pervasive. They cover all aspects, from making a noise to preventing the normal flow of business. There was a situation where if workers were not trapped by the state, they would be trapped by the code of conduct. All in all the room for manoeuvre, in terms of publicising the strike, in terms of pickets, in terms

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of putting direct pressure on OK sales, was severely constrained. The union was able to pressurise OK management and dismissals failed to make an impact in the face of worker unity and national co-ordination.

The company miscalculated the depth of bitterness amongst the workers. In many ways the OK strike was prefigured by a spontaneous strike on 22 September 1986 at 15 stores in Johannesburg and Garankuwa. In this strike two union shop-stewards were dismissed. Workers warned that they were becoming more angry with OK Bazaars and that the dismissal of 2,000 workers in just two years was viewed with growing concern by the union. This was despite an earlier agreement with CCAWUSA in February 1985 that OK management would seek alternatives, such as short time and a ban on overtime rather than retrenchments. The following two years however saw a process of "back door retrenchments" with workers dismissed for reasons such as petty theft, minor offences, and "political" offences such as not seeking permission to attend union conferences. During the strike management's strike breaking tactics, such as at Vereeniging stores where, the union alleges pepper was sprinkled on the floors to prevent workers congregating in the canteen, or at Sandton where it is alleged that shop-stewards were visited by police at home with personnel files from OK merely deepened workers anger.

Management's resistance to the strike must be seen in the light of these factors. At a superficial level management tried to present their resistance as a response to "unreasonable" demands put forward by the union. They argued that CCAWUSA's wage demands would "wipe out their profits". CCAWUSA sees this response as an attempt to put the blame for economic and political crisis in this country onto the shoulders of the workers. There is a definite crisis in the country, but this is not a profitability crisis neither does its cause lie with the workers. OK's profits over the last few months have been on the increase. Even if profits were not on the increase, workers have no control over decision-making priorities or economic planning in these concerns. If blunders are made, the workers should not be victimised. Workers are still entitled to a living wage.

Solidarity

There is no doubt that solidarity action from the community and from the various union groupings played a major role in pressuris-

ing management. Within COSATU the blacking campaign by sister unions like Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and pressure from shop-stewards at Anglo linked companies was crucial. Support from CUSA-AZACTU unions linked to Anglo was also crucial. Many of the workers within this latter federation, such as at AECI, Unilever, and some of the Coca-Cola factories occupy strategic positions in the Anglo structure. Through them, and with the help of a number of independents we were able to apply effective pressure, management were clearly concerned about the strike spreading. In fact a number of unions (eg. municipal workers) threatened strike action if the dispute was not resolved. Increasingly workers are beginning to understand the linkages under monopoly capitalism, they are becoming aware of how the Anglo-American ownership structure transcends industries.

An Anglo-American shop stewards council meeting was convened by COSATU in which unions were able to discuss and respond to the strike. What we have learnt from this is the need for unity, the need for a co-ordinated response which transcends ideological differences in order to advance our struggle. We have however seen that the kind of response across unions and in various regions remains uneven. A lot of work must still be done in this area, in fact the OK strike has highlighted this need. Community action was also very important, through these groups pamphleteering, funding, and general awareness of the strike was fostered. Most of the work done by them could not have been undertaken by the union under present conditions. CCAWUSA shop-stewards responded to this by forming their own monitoring group which could evaluate the impact of a consumer boycott on OK sales.

Scabs

Because of the nature of the retail industry, the need for high turnover and the importance of keeping stores open every day there is no doubt that management's ability to find easy replacements for the striking workers was of vital importance. In this sense the strike came at a bad time in that there was a lot of casual labour around. School students were on holiday and many of them were employed as scab labour. Management was also able to play on divisions amongst the workers. In this sense the role of the "sweetheart" union NUDAW (National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers Union) was important. Many Coloured and Indian workers belong to NUDAW. CCAWUSA views this union as disruptive. In Cape Town and Durban this union came out openly against the

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strike, also many scabs were employed through NUDAW members. CCAWUSA is engaged in a programme to expose the role of this union. Ironically after the strike 20 NUDAW members who were employed as scab labour came to join CCAWUSA. A branch secretary of this union has also now joined us.

The strike has particularly highlighted the right to picket. Unions need to rally around to challenge this curtailment of our rights. Many of our members now awaiting the outcome of arbitration have been picked up because of this. These workers faced criminal charges, such as trespassing, intimidation and contravention of municipal by-laws because of picketing. OK now wants to dismiss these workers as a result of these criminal proceedings.

Impact on other employers

The whole co-operation between state and capital has been of particular importance insofar as the attitudes of other employers was concerned. The fact that the union has been able to win our wage demand in spite of this has significantly affected our relationship with other employers. The Pick and Pay settlement which followed on the heels of the OK strike (see elsewhere in this edition) is a tremendous achievement for the union. This is one of the best settlements CCAWUSA has seen thus far.

Notes

1. Interview with CCAWUSA, March 1987
2. From Work in Progress February 1987, p 5
3. Interview with CCAWUSA, ibid

(Coletane Markham, March 1987)

CCAWUSA moves towards a living wage

As a result of wage negotiations between CCAWUSA and Pick 'n' Pay the highest wage increase in South African labour history for a large group of workers has been achieved. For the first time also in a major retailer May Day and June 16th have been negotiated and agreed as paid holidays for all union members at Pick 'n' Pay. As such this is an important precedent setting move.

An across the board increase of R100 has been negotiated. This is effectively from March 1st, covers the next 12 months and does not involve split increases or an anniversary date system. This is a 25.6 percent increase for the lowest paid members and the increase affects over 13,300 workers.

The minimum wage in Pick 'n' Pay has also been increased by R100 to R490 per month. The average wage is now R612 per month.

In line with COSATU's living wage campaign the union's position during the negotiations was that Pick 'n' Pay must pay a living wage that will enable workers to lead a decent life.

The union also tabled demands on equal training opportunities, a 40 hour week and no tax deductions. Serious discussions were carried out on these topics - the fact that people are not simply born to work and that workers are not willing to pay for their own oppression were put to management. Management were requested to take the union's statements to members of the government.

Negotiations were conducted and the agreement achieved over a relatively short period of time. This is an indication of the level of organisation and stature of CCAWUSA in Pick 'n' Pay.

Last year in a precedent setting move and after a major occupation of Pick 'n' Pay stores an across the board increase of R85 was negotiated. This had a ripple effect on other retailers. This wage agreement should have significant consequences for the retail trade as a whole and add further impetus to COSATU's living wage campaign.

(CCAWUSA communique, March 1987)

Nels/Bliss workers fight on

The struggle to reinstate 750 Nels/Bliss workers continues nine months after they were fired for allegedly participating in an "illegal" strike. Management has consistently refused to talk to the union, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) throughout the dispute. In fact Nels management have followed a negative, anti-union attitude ever since CCAWUSA first started organising at the three plants. Labour relations methods at Nels are generally heavy-handed; at the height of the strike organiser Oscar Malgas was threatened with a pistol as he tried to enter the premises to talk to management. There have also been signs of open collaboration with the police. Nels management were amongst the first to feel the benefits of the State of Emergency as police detained striking workers.

Now CCAWUSA has resolved to step up the pressure against Nels/Bliss. Given that all attempts at negotiation have failed CCAWUSA claims that they are now forced to "break Nels/Bliss if they continue their hardline and negative attitude towards us".

For the workers the dispute has caused hardship and suffering. Many of the workers are migrants, they are particularly vulnerable to mass dismissal. Workers have faced months without any income, and periodic evictions from their hostels in Alexandra and Denver because they cannot pay rents. Their dependants are also suffering; workers say that they are extremely anxious about not sending anything home for months now. Each day the workers congregate at the union head-office to eat mealie-meal and soup which is provided for their subsistence. Nevertheless the determination to carry on is high; meetings are held regularly to discuss methods of sustaining their action. Some workers are also thinking of putting on a play which will record their struggle.

Background to the strike

The strike began on the June 10 1986 after six workers, according to the union, were unfairly dismissed by management. This coupled with bad working conditions, low pay, and managements refusal to recognise their union resulted in a spontaneous strike at one plant. During the day management met with the workers and they resolved to return to work the following day. However on

their return the next day three of the union shop-stewards were suspended. CCAWUSA then tried to contact management but the organiser was barred from entering the premises. Workers subsequently went out on a strike at all Nels plants on the 18th, demanding the reinstatement of their colleagues, recognition of the union, and payment for the period out of work. Management however responded by issuing an ultimatum to return to work or face dismissal. Later that day police were called in. They then proceeded to detain 999 of the workers. On their release two weeks later six of the workers were charged with murder for allegedly attacking scabs. (Two have now been released for lack of evidence.)

Management has tried all means to demoralize the workers. Scabs have been brought in and are maintaining production of Nels/Bliss products, twenty of the workers who were living on company premises have been evicted. Attempts to evict workers living in the hostels have also been made. CCAWUSA maintains that the union repeatedly tried to contact management whilst workers were in detention. All attempts however were ignored.

Solidarity for Nels/Bliss Workers

The period since June has been taken up with various tactics for pressurising management. Sympathy strike action at Checkers and Pick and Pay stores in December last year saw some success. Workers sat in for two to three hours during which time demands were put forward to remove all Nels/Bliss products from the shelves. Workers also demanded that management give an undertaking not to replace these products until Nels had spoken to their union. Action stopped after Pick and Pay then gave an undertaking to approach Nels. A meeting subsequently took place between CCAWUSA and Nels; however the union claims that the meeting was a dismal failure. According to organiser, Oscar Malgas the meeting lasted one hour, during which time management simply re-informed the union of their unwillingness to talk. An unacceptable proposal to reinstate only 365 of the workers, many of these already scabs, was also put forward.

CCAUSA has received some support in the community. Shopowners in Soweto and Alexandra townships are not ordering Nels/Bliss products, while a fairly successful consumer boycott is taking place. The union promises that the pressure will be maintained and the struggle of Nels workers will not be forgotten.
(Coletane Markham, March 1987)

Clover – the struggle continues

Settlement of the nine-month dispute between Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and Clover/NCD remains remote. Negotiations with the company have broken down at all five meetings between the union and management since September 1986. About a month ago management made a "final offer" which was once again rejected.

168 Clover workers were dismissed at the Pietermaritzburg plant in June last year after they had struck in protest against the victimisation of two of the union shop-stewards. According to management the shopstewards had instigated workers to attack an UWUSA organiser and an Inkatha councillor in an earlier strike on June 6. Workers were demanding that management fulfill their promise to implement an interim wage increase, due in February that year. It appears that Inkatha officials and an UWUSA organiser had visited the plant on the 6th and that they had pointed arms at the striking workers. Shopstewards controlled the situation and later managed to come to an agreement with the bosses about the increase and also that no striker would be victimised. On the 27th however management held a "disciplinary enquiry" and then dismissed two workers. The union tried to obtain their reinstatement during that weekend but was unsuccessful. The next week workers who were striking in protest at the outcome of the disciplinary proceedings were given a final ultimatum and dismissed.

Management had also antagonised workers in the months before the strike by allowing access to UWUSA organisers and the Inkatha Councillor, Awethu. Regular meetings between the regional manager and UWUSA took place despite the fact that this union was not recognised and had only managed to recruit three members at the plant. On the other hand FAWU had already managed to gain limited recognition rights and was in the process of trying to formalise this agreement at the time of the dispute. (see SALB 11.7)

The dispute, the longest in FAWU's history, once again highlights the intransigent and anti-union attitudes pursued by management in the dairy industry. FAWU had majority representation at most of the Natal plants: Congella, Queensburgh, Richards Bay, Stanger, Port Shepstone, Ladysmith, Newcastle, and Mooi River at the time. The union was also beginning to make an inroad into the Transvaal area. Nevertheless it was a struggle to win recognition rights;

limited rights were won at Pietermaritzburg and Durban after much struggle. It appears that management in the dairy industry have commonly used the tactic of delaying formal recognition in order to prevent wage increases. This has sometimes resulted in spontaneous "illegal" strikes. (see Dairybelle dispute in SALB 11.3.)

Ownership

According to the union, management has a backward attitude towards labour relations. This may be partly explained by the ownership structures at Clover/NCD. NCD is owned by a co-operative of Transvaal and Free-State based farmers. Clover, a subsidiary of NCD, is the largest dairy establishment in Natal and one of the biggest in the country. The industry is very competitive; within NCD competition between Clover, Dairybelle, and Creamline has prevented the formation of a single dairy employers body. The Industrial Council has historically never seen negotiations around wage increases, this is usually simply left to government wage determinations. Competition amongst the employers and their generally conservative political outlook has resulted in a very negative attitude towards progressive unions.

FAWU claims that the union submitted their proposals for recognition at the Pietermaritzburg plant as early as 1984. Management took more than a year to respond, and another few months to even agree to a meeting with the union in order to discuss the draft proposal. There has also been a refusal to negotiate any wage increases with the union, even in plants with majority representation, until formal recognition rights have been obtained. The union made substantial progress at Durban and Pietermaritzburg when they were able to negotiate the interim wage increases. Management has also continually refused to negotiate acceptable disciplinary/grievance procedures, or discuss working conditions. The strike resulted when even the limited victory, the interim increase, was being denied to the workers.

Clover workers have drawn up a list of sixteen demands, calling inter alia for the reinstatement of all dismissed workers, recognition of their union, that the company refrain from promoting UWUSA at the plant, and that all previous wage increases negotiated with FAWU be implemented. At subsequent talks workers moved their position with regard to the call for complete reinstatement. Managements offer at the last talks was that 3 workers with over twenty years service be taken back at Pietermaritzburg,

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and that a further 50 workers with over ten years service be given employment at other plants. The rest would be paid off at an average rate of four months pay. Workers proposed that a further 5 workers with 17 or more years of service be taken back at Pietermaritzburg, and that another 26 with between five and ten years service be offered other employment. The remaining workers must be guaranteed jobs should they wish to return to work in the future, and that they receive eight months pay. Management have as yet indicated no willingness to dismiss the 100 scabs they brought in to replace the original workers and in an attempt to break FAWU,

UWUSA strike breakers

Bolstered by increased state repression under the State of Emergency, and accustomed to years of despotic authority over the workers, the bosses are now confident that they can reverse the gains made by FAWU over the last few years. Employers attempts to smash the union, initially through delaying recognition rights, has now acquired an added twist with the arrival of UWUSA. The role of Inkatha members, and UWUSA officials during the strike clearly indicates this. FAWU claims that Councillor Awethu played a direct role in bringing in scabs.

Dairy workers, like other workers closely connected to the agricultural sector, remain a particularly vulnerable sector of the workforce. They face low wages, bad working conditions, and the racist and repressive attitudes of their bosses. This is worsened by structural constraints, easily exploited by management, such as the large migrant component of the workforce and the greater intervention of the state in regulating labour relations within the industry. The industry is defined as an "essential sector" with associated constraints on workers right to strike. A sympathy strike by 9 Clover establishments in Natal during September, was the first legal strike within this sector in FAWU's history. The procedures whereby legal strike action can be undertaken are time consuming and complex, thus making it difficult to address immediate worker grievances. Management have indicated their appreciation of this fact by further delaying recognition rights for unions. When workers engage in "illegal" strike action due to their frustration, they are harshly dealt with: mass dismissals and eviction of migrant workers from company hostels are the order of the day. This option, once taken, places unions in a difficult position. The ability to reinstate workers thereafter depending much on management willingness to negotiate in good faith with the union,

and the workers ability to exert pressure on management in various ways outside of the immediate strike action. It is also clear that employers encourage illegal strike action in an attempt to crush unions. FAWU was very aware of this problem, the union had to exercise a great deal of restraint in terms of preventing the spread of illegal action to other Clover plants.

The majority of Clover workers fortunately live in areas close to Pietermaritzburg, such that eviction from hostel premises has not broken workers contact with each other. Workers are still able to meet on a weekly basis and engage in various activities which can sustain their unity. Clover workers have since produced a play, they have made T-shirts, booklets, and badges for sale. Financial aid has also been received from other COSATU affiliates, money collections from support groups, and overseas aid.

Consumer boycott

Nevertheless the impact of tightened Emergency regulations with regard to consumer boycott action has restricted the unions ability to increase pressure on management. FAWU has faced regular raids on union offices. In addition the company has now successfully obtained a court interdict against union officials preventing them from participating in calls for consumer action or making any statements which undermine the image of Clover/NCD. In addition the company may try to extend the interdict to cover other groups as well. FAWU argues that employers have been able to hold out at the last talks because of these factors. Consumer boycott action in Natal and the Transvaal, the strong points of the company, has slackened recently. This is largely attributable to the general climate of repression. The strike also came at a bad time for the union. It came shortly after the merger, and at a time when the union was still consolidating itself within the dairy industry. This is particularly true of the Transvaal area, thus making it difficult thus far to extend sympathy action to this region.

Notwithstanding these factors however it is clear that Clover management are beginning to relent. They have shifted a long way from their dogmatic refusal to reinstate any of the workers. FAWU firmly believes that further pressure will force management to settle. The outcome of the Clover dispute holds important implications for dairy workers in the future.

(Coletane Markham, March 1987)

PWAWU victory at Mondi

The Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAWU) has completed their first battle to establish national company level negotiations, and is due to take on Sappi and Nampak in the near future. The nine day strike by 1,700 Mondi Board workers ended in victory for the union. Wage increases went up above the inflation rate and rural-urban parity in wages was achieved for the first time. National pressure, a well co-ordinated and unified response on the part of Mondi Board workers at all five plants played a major role in the final outcome. Equally important however, the strike and similar struggles at Nampak and Sappi will be an indicator of future success around attempts to reconstitute a national industry wide negotiating forum.

PWAWU says that they will push for national company level negotiations before wage talks begin towards the end of 1987. Now that the dispute with Mondi has ended the union faces an even tougher battle with Gencor-owned Sappi. The Sappi group has historically proved to be a major stumbling block, as their low wage rates tended to depress wage levels across the entire industry. PWAWU will have to struggle to push Sappi to pay the same wages as other companies within the industry. Co-ordinating committees have been established to ensure that similar demands are made at each company. The union has also stated that in future it will not accept a wage offer at any factory without all plants in the same company agreeing to that settlement. Mondi workers initially demanded 70c across the board increase, May Day and June 16th as paid holidays, an increase in shift allowance and increased holiday bonuses.

Worker organisation and solidarity during the Mondi strike holds important lessons for future struggles at Nampak, Carlton and Sappi. At each plant workers adopted the strategy which would best suit them. At the same time no move on any issue relating to negotiations was made without consultations and agreement at all the other plants. In some areas workers resolved the problem of scabs by conducting sleep-in strikes, whilst at others workers would gather at the factory premises each day. Solidarity action also depended on the location of the factory and the nature of the strike at the factory. At Springs the COSATU local provided resources, whilst Western Cape strikers received support from workers in other paper factories.

Managements attempts to break the strike by bringing in scabs generally proved to be a failure. At Springs machines had to be shut down after two scabs were seriously injured. The Umgeni plant, where one machine was started towards the end of the strike succeeded in producing mainly waste. Management also tried to bring in the police and army, however this had limited success. Workers responded by warning that they could not guarantee the safety of machinery if they were forcibly removed. A number of workers at Piet Retief were detained and questioned. At Empangeni the company employed ex-conscripts to try and keep machines running.

Nevertheless worker unity and national co-ordination eventually succeeded in getting Mondi management to give in to many of the unions demands. The final settlement includes:

- * a 50c per hour increase in the lower grades, with a further 5c per hour increase in July. Minimum hourly wage rates will therefore increase to R3,15. Skilled workers will receive a 65c per hour increase with a further 5c in July.
- * a 40% increase in shift allowance
- * holiday bonus increases of R130
- * June 16 as paid holiday

A significant victory for the union was also managements agreement to discuss the grading scheme, long regarded by workers as an artificial means of dividing them, and to discuss a reduction of working hours to a 40 hour week.

PWAWU's long term objective, to reconstitute a national bargaining forum stems from the union's long battle with the undemocratic Paper, Pulp Industrial Council. In 1985 the NEC decided to enter the Industrial Council in an attempt to consolidate national industry wide bargaining. A few months later however PWAWU walked out of the Council, arguing that it was not a successful national bargaining forum, and questioning the undemocratic system of representation within that body. Small unions, organising mainly white workers, had equal voting rights with PWAWU thereby dominating the Council. As a result PWAWU walked out of the Industrial Council effectively destroying it. (see SALB 11.1)

PWAWU argued that the Council united employers as a class against the union, whilst any attempts to challenge that were hampered by the bureaucratic and wholly unrepresentative craft unions. The Industrial Council would normally simply take the lowest wages in the industry and then declare that the national legal minimum,

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whilst the Council's existence was also used to deny the union the right to plant level negotiations. PWAU's battle to reconstitute a national bargaining forum on terms set by the union; viz majority unionism, minimum national negotiating rights, as well as plant level bargaining, holds important implications for unions struggling against bargaining forums set up by employers and the state.

(Coletane Markham, March 1987)



photo: Mondri workers strike for higher pay (New Nation)

Metal talks and MAWU's national wage campaign

The first meeting of the National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel, Engineering and Metal Industries (NICISEMI) in this years wage round, was held on March 10. The MAWU NEC and 200 shop-stewards attended the first session. Unions also taking part in negotiations with SEIFSA (the employers federation) are the Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU), MAWU's fellow International Metalworkers Federation affiliates (IMF), the Mine Workers Union and the S A Iron, Steel and Allied Industries Union.

MAWU demands for 1987 are:

1. A basic minimum rate of R4 an hour.
2. A guaranteed across-the-board increase of R1 an hour.
3. Recognition of May Day and June 16 as paid holidays.
4. The reduction of the working week from 45 hours to 40 hours without loss of pay.
5. Improved overtime rates.
6. Six months paid maternity leave, plus 14 days paid paternity leave. (See article elsewhere in this edition.)
7. An end to PAYE deductions from members pay.
8. Basic trade union rights (stop-orders, shop-steward recognition and access to company premises for union officials) to be included in the main agreement.

New demands, i.e. an end to PAYE deductions and trade union basic rights have been included in the 1987 demands. MAWU argues that PAYE was introduced to black workers to curb rising government spending on maintaining apartheid. The demand for basic trade union rights was included given the struggle MAWU is engaged in with metal employers who try to bog the union down in lengthy negotiations for a recognition agreement, denying basic union rights in the meantime (see the article on recognition struggles elsewhere in this edition). The union demands to negotiate this issue at national level.

SEIFSA rejected the demands. Their counter-offer was 30 cents increase an hour for unskilled workers to 60 cents an hour for skilled workers. Their proposed minimum rate is R2,52 an hour. However, SEIFSA claims that the present offer is not final. They will offer something better if the unions are prepared to com-

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promise the present demands and move further down to reach an agreement with SEIFSA. The next meeting to continue negotiations was scheduled for 15 April 1987.

There is a vast difference between MAWU and SEIFSA's position. Employers are claiming that the unions demands will cost "R1 billion". MAWU believes this is nonsensical. The union claims "SEIFSA has shown what it would cost to meet present demands, but has never shown the total earnings of the industry. If SEIFSA does not have these figures, how do they know the cost of higher wages."

Profits

The union argues that a few corporations which dominate the South African economy, and the metal industry in particular, have been able to swallow smaller and weaker competitors and increased the already huge concentration of wealth and control. The MAWU speech given at the NICISEMI talks on 10 March 1986 sum-up the argument as follows:

Although some of the smaller and weaker companies in the industry have collapsed, the majority of the bigger companies are again reporting record profits, on average the profits reported this year have increased by well over the inflation rate, just look at AMIC, or ALTRON, or DORBYL. AMIC assets, for instance, increased in value by 1100% in 10 years. A recent survey of profits reported by 132 companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange reported an average profit increase of 30%.

Huge profits have been realised by "rationalisation" and other cost-cutting mechanism, eg. "flexibility". Many factories have closed. Their machines and orders were absorbed into other factories; workers have been retrenched, made redundant and replaced by machines. Employers have forced workers to operate more than one machine at the same rate. More than 110,000 jobs have been lost in the metal industry since 1982, according to MAWU.

The union has declared its intention to defend members against employers attacks through "rationalisation" and "flexibility" and has called upon all metal workers to engage in struggle if the 1987 National Wage Campaign is to be successful.

Past struggles: the 1986 campaign

The 1986 MAWU National Wage Campaign took the struggle of the metal workers (especially in MAWU) even further. Demands presented in 1986 were as follows:

1. 50 cents increase across-the-board an hour.
2. R3,50 minimum rate an hour.
3. 40 hour week, without loss of pay.
4. Six months paid maternity leave, and 14 days paid paternity leave.
5. May Day and June 16 to be paid holidays.
6. Job security.
7. Right to strike without dismissal.

Throughout the negotiation period workers exerted pressure on individual affiliates of SEIFSA. An one-hour stoppage, followed by an overtime ban and lastly an one-day stoppage took place. This action was taken nationally except for the one-day stoppage (see below). Employers finally offered 32 cents for the unskilled workers as against a much lower initial offer. MAWU viewed this as victory. Umbiko We MAWU puts it as follows: "In 1985 SEIFSA had said business was bad and they only agreed to offer 14 cents an hour increase. In 1986 business was even worse, but they offered 32c. Workers' co-ordinated action forced employers to make this offer." MAWU membership grew from 36,800 to 52,000 during this period according to the union's paper.

An overtime ban - called to strengthen the campaign - had the effect of dividing SEIFSA. On the Transvaal shop-steward council held on 1 June 1986, shop-stewards reported different management response to the overtime ban. Amongst the responses the following were noted as serious attacks by management:

1. Introduction of the 3-shift system.
2. The employment of white or coloured workers.
3. Retrenchments.

Most companies which attempted to introduce the 3-shift system already had some of their departments operating on a 3-shift basis, and this meant that workers in those departments were always working overtime. The ban on overtime disrupted production in such companies, and managements saw the solution as being the introduction of a 3-shift system for the entire factory. Workers responses

- MAWU National Wage Campaign -

included demands for transport for the last shift, improved shift allowances and health facilities - demands that were rejected by employers.

The employment of white or coloured workers was viewed by members as a racial strategy on the part of management. Workers noted that management was prepared to pay higher wages only to white or coloured workers.

Retrenchments were viewed as a means to get rid of the union: "Instead of paying higher wages to MAWU members employers prefer to fine us, and hire other workers who won't join any union and demand higher wages", said a Dorbyl shop-steward.

Most companies that introduced a 3-shift system or hired white or coloured workers withdrew these plans after workers took industrial action. They instead broke away from SEIFSA's tradition of not allowing plant-level bargaining on substantive issues, and at the same time expressed a wish to withdraw from the NICISEMI. MAWU rejected this position for the following reasons:

Because of overtime pressure, some SEIFSA companies are now trying to pull out of the Industrial Council. They are telling workers that they will negotiate only at plant-level. In this way they are trying to divide workers. They want workers only to worry about factory negotiations.

All-level bargaining

The union solution to this problem has been to demand plant-level bargaining on top of centralised bargaining. In fact this has been the principle from the first day MAWU decided to join the NICISEMI (see SALB 8.5). The failure to adequately implement this principle weakened the 1986 National Wage Campaign. Insofar as members were mobilised nationally, (in the initial days of the overtime ban) but were divided as individual employers began to respond differently to the boycott. According to a MAWU organiser on the East Rand, "this confirmed to MAWU leadership that our structures are not functioning properly." Workers don't understand NICISEMI negotiations."

New struggles developed over employers' responses. In Benoni, Denva Metal Workers went on strike after management attempted to introduce a 3-shift system, and rejected workers demands for

transport for night shift workers, an increase in night shift allowance to 16%, and that more workers be employed for the night shift on a permanent basis. Originally only the foundry was working a 3-shift system, other departments were not involved. The strike lasted for three days, after which management withdrew their plans and demanded that workers call off the overtime ban and for negotiations on wages to take place at the factory.

At Sandvik in Benoni, management tried to overcome the ban by employing white workers. MAWU members went on a strike after management attempted to replace black workers with white workers on brazing machines. The strike was also called off after management withdrew white workers and proposed that negotiations take place on a 3-shift system and wages at plant-level.

In Wadeville, Dorbyl Structures and Transport retrenched workers. Management claimed that an overtime ban resulted in penalties being imposed for late delivery of orders by their customers ISCOR, ESCOM, and SATS.

The union was caught in a difficult situation. Companies opened up negotiations at plant-level, while MAWU and SEIFSA were still negotiating wages at the NICISEMI. Workers paid more attention to factory negotiations as a result of being "impatient" with the Industrial Council negotiations, according to MAWU. Plant-level talks on wages took place at different factories and at different times. This was problematic for local organisers as strikes occurred in many factories without having been planned or discussed by the local shop-steward council. During negotiations some workers put emphasis only on wages. Other demands presented to SEIFSA were not followed up. When SEIFSA made the final offer of 32c, MAWU members did not unanimously support the proposed one-day stoppage - as many factories had already settled with their local managements on wages.

Lessons

Clearly, as one MAWU organiser pointed out, not all members understood the NICISEMI negotiations and the significance of demands sent to the Industrial Council. The principle of all-level bargaining also posed a problem.

MAWU's procedure for drawing up demands is as follows: factories send proposals to their respective locals. The locals discuss

- MAWU National Wage Campaign

these and refer their proposals to the BEC. If consensus between locals is reached at the BEC, demands are referred to the NEC. Discussion also takes place at this forum and thereafter a recommendation is referred back to the branches which are expected to endorse the demands.

In October 1986 a national pamphlet was distributed to the shop-stewards. A special shop-stewards council was held whereby shop-stewards were asked to raise discussion at their respective factories as to what are worker demands for 1987. Report-backs were given to the locals and deliberations at local level were then referred to the BEC and thereafter to the NEC. Endorsement of these demands took place at the MAWU Annual General Meeting held on 15 November 1986 at Durban.

How this happens in practice remains to be thoroughly investigated especially with regard to the involvement of MAWU in NICISEMI - a state promoted forum for collective bargaining. MAWU's decision to join the Industrial Council in 1983 was justified on tactical grounds. The union believed that the NICISEMI is the means whereby it can unite demands and mobilise on a mass national basis. (see SALB 8.5) However the 1986 campaign illustrated the problem of mobilising on the basis of all-level bargaining.

The union has tried to overcome these problems this year in part by producing a comprehensive booklet for the 1987 campaign which explains the various demands. The union believes that demands were not properly discussed at the factory level last year. MAWU hopes that the booklet will ensure that an educational process develops even further than last year.

To what extent does the 1986 campaign confirm the argument that has been going on for four years, that the involvement of independent unions in state promoted forms of collective bargaining carries the risk of distancing the union leadership from the shop-floor? Did strikes on wages at different factories and at different periods by MAWU members indicate a rejection of NICISEMI by rank and file members or "an impatience to wait for the conclusion of NICISEMI negotiations" as the union puts it? It remains to be seen what will develop in the 1987 National Wage Campaign.

(Jabu Matiko, March 1987)

1987 – the year mineworkers take control

Speech by James Motlatsi, President of the NUM:

Comrade Vice-President, Fraternal Guests, Comrades and Friends.

I welcome you to the 5th Annual Congress of the National Union of Mineworkers. It is with regret that our Honorary Life President, Comrade Nelson Mandela, cannot be with us today. He languishes in a racist dungeon, jailed for the past 25 years, for this unflinching commitment to freedom and democracy for South Africa's oppressed people. The greatest monument we can build, in honour for what he stands, is a united NUM and COSATU, which fights side by side with all those committed to ending racist tyranny and capitalist exploitation in our country.

We gather, as you know, at a time of immense crisis in our country and Southern Africa. It is a time which we, as part of the trade union and liberation movement, must make important decisions on the way forward.

We have set the theme for this Congress – 1987 The Year Mineworkers Take Control – in the firm belief, that when mineworkers and, for that matter, the South African working class take control of their lives at all levels, we will be able to solve the problems facing this country of ours.

Discussing this theme during the Congress will raise many questions, and it is my task, through the address, to bring together the issues in ways which will guide the deliberations. It is the task of this Congress to give a clear policy direction to our actions for the next period.

The NUM has come a long way since it was started in August 1982. Today we have over 360,000 members, without doubt, the biggest national union in our country and regarded as the fastest growing union in the world. We have organised mineworkers in the gold, coal, platinum, chrome, antimony, copper and other base metal mines. During the five years, we have established a presence on virtually every mine in South Africa.

- NUM/Presidential address -

Throughout this time, we have waged many battles against the mine employers. We have fought for our right to exist, in a world where workers have, for over a century, suffered untold hardships and where the right to unionisation was fiercely resisted. We have fought for the right to exist against all odds and this has not been easy. Hostile managements, repressive mine security and police have not stopped the gallant march of mineworkers unity and organisation. Disciplined action, brave leadership by shaft stewards and the general courage of our rank and file have been the reasons for our survival. But we have not come to Congress to air our victories and pat one another on the back.

No! comrades, we have come to evaluate our actions, over the last five years, in order that we may sharpen our organisation, its leadership and its vision of the future. To the mine owners and its trusted partner, the Botha regime, I say, the NUM is here and will remain until victory is won!

The Crisis

But comrades, to guarantee victory we must carefully assess the balance of forces in our country and the general crisis which exists. As one of the greatest champions of workers struggle put it:

Without a clear understanding of the nature and conditions of the struggle, there can be no useful political action.

Comrades, the crisis at hand is a deep rooted one. It is an economic, political and ideological crisis which has placed the liberation movement on the offensive on a number of fronts.

At the same time we have seen large scale repression. Over 20,000 people have been detained during the State of Emergency. If anything it indicates that the Apartheid regime cannot rule in its old way.

Let's take a closer look at the crisis, because how we see things will shape the action we take, and affect the future of the liberation struggle.

Economic Crisis

South Africa is in a structural economic crisis. It is one of economic mismanagement and investment which has not improved the

conditions for the vast majority of people. It is further reflected in the continued impoverishment of the rural economy. In the urban area the social needs of the working class, for example housing, social and health facilities, transport, improved infrastructure and so forth have also not been met. The other factors of the crisis can be seen in:

- * the deepening of the recession;
- * the ranks of the unemployed swell to over 3 million people;
- * steady rise of inflation with the cost of living for workers increased;
- * millions of rand being pumped into the homelands, the tricameral system and other Apartheid projects to keep the dream alive;
- * public sector programmes are sacrificed for expanded military budgets;
- * no productive investment is taking place which creates employment, even though certain sectors have been making significant profits and;
- * the devaluation of the South African rand.

Whilst there have been many arguments that productive investment has not taken place because of capital outflow since 1985, what exists is not a shortage of profit and other cash resources, but the use of these resources.

Comrades while these features of the crisis exist it is not a generalised crisis of profitability. This is so because certain sectors such as mining and finance have made dramatic profits in the last few years. The Sunday Star Finance Review reported that South African corporations, especially the larger ones, have been making all time profit increases. A look at 165 sets of reports released between June and August 1986 by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange showed an average of 72% surge in earnings per share. Of the 165 companies, 72% reported improved earnings, while 5% held steady.

Comrades, it is important that we understand the particular nature of the economic crisis if we are to challenge the employers for improved wages and working conditions. Because they too are using the arguments that times are difficult and that they are unable to meet our demands.

What the crisis has done is put the control of the economic resources in fewer and fewer hands. Put simply, monopoly

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capitalism, through widespread rationalisation, mergers, reorganisation of management structures and production techniques has put the ownership and control of the wealth of this country in the hands of a few giant companies. It is this class, which controls the resources, that refuses to invest the millions they have made in profit, so that jobs can be created, and improve the quality of life. It is because they are only concerned with more profit.

Comrades, these big companies, aided by Botha's economic policies, such as deregulation, border industries, small business development and privatisation are trying to undercut the gains made by the trade union movement. They use these policies to depress wages and develop a situation where no minimum conditions of employment are enforceable.

In general, comrades, it is the working class and oppressed people who have suffered the brunt of the crisis. It is a direct result of the government's policies and because the free enterprise system does not serve the interest of the mass of people. All it has meant is the freedom to exploit and pay poverty wages; the freedom to ignore the demands and needs of the mass of people.

The crisis is a crisis of capitalism, because it will not be able to address our needs and demands. For that we need to find alternatives which will guarantee that the wealth which is produced by the working people is enjoyed by the people. We need a social system which will wipe out the poverty, hunger and disease. We need a social system which will house our families and protect the interests of the working class.

Political and Ideological Crisis

On the political front, the crisis has been most severe. Attempts by the government to impose the tricameral system and community councils have totally failed. Its reform plans have been met with large scale opposition from every part of the country - urban and rural areas. Today they lie in ruins. In the countryside, for example, mass resistance has led to the breakup of so-called tribal authorities and in some instances been replaced with democratic village committees.

It was this rising tide of opposition, which was increasingly gaining a national and generalised character, that forced the government to declare a State of Emergency. With brutal force the

state detained thousands of activists, including trade unionists. The aims of the Emergency have been:

1. To undermine and where possible smash democratic organisation of workers, youth, women and communities.
2. To regulate the flow of information at home and overseas. By limiting information the government wishes to present a picture to the world community that it has everything under control.

The State of Emergency has, no doubt, been brought about by the continuous struggle over the past two years. In particular, the heroic struggle of our youth and students against gutter education has sent the regime into panic. The collapse of government structures and the weeding out of collaborators, and the development of alternative structures, for example, street committees, has taken the struggle to new heights. Although still very uneven, there is a growing realisation that deepening democratic organisation is the only defence against the repression.

To break organisations, wide powers have been given to the police and army to do as they wish. And together with the vigilante squads, a reign of terror has been unleashed against those who dare challenge the Apartheid authority. It is hoped that the morale of resistance will be destroyed. What the state has failed to understand is that to stop the liberation march they will have to stop the nation.

It is clear the regime is totally rejected. It cannot rule in the old way and even within its own ranks divisions have become abundant. Its ability to address the crisis - economically and politically - is not possible. The initiative is now with the oppressed people, with the organised working class under the leadership of COSATU having an important responsibility.

For us as mineworkers there is also a great task ahead. It is vital that we act now, to strengthen our organisation and take the struggle to a new phase. But it depends how we act. We must not underestimate the enemy, nor overlook our weaknesses. Whatever we do should always enhance our organisation, broaden its base and ensure maximum unity in our ranks. It should also steel yet preserve our leadership.

Comrades, there are three areas in which we, as mineworkers, can

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take the struggle forward. Some of these campaigns are narrowly focused, while others are much broader. The common factor is that we wish to control our lives on every front. To start this process is to lay the foundations of a new democratic order. It is a task we cannot postpone. Because the kind of society we want to build, we must build today, and not tomorrow or on liberation day. As one great teacher of struggle put it: "The birth of a new society must be laid in the womb of the old."

Taking control of the hostels

The mining industry, as we all know, is based on the hated migrant labour system. Together with the compounds and the induna system - developed over a century ago - the mineowners have kept us in conditions of wage slavery and oppression. These systems have robbed us of our dignity and destroyed our family life. The empire of the mineowners has been built with the blood, sweat and toil of black workers. Workers' rewards have been low wages, unhealthy and dangerous working conditions. Many comrades have paid the ultimate sacrifice of death at the hands of this brutal capitalist system.

1987 is the year NUM will begin to change this. We will fight every inch of the way to destroy the hostels, migrant labour and the induna system.

The joint investigation by AAC and the NUM into mine violence pointed out that the root cause of the problem is migrant labour and the hostels. This we have repeated over and over since we were formed. The mine owners have been very quiet. They have refused to condemn the system which has brought so much misery, hardship and bloodshed.

The mine owners have refused to admit publicly that for a century they have benefitted from an evil system and are committed to abolishing it. We are calling on the mineowners to state clearly that they will do away with migrant labour and hostels.

We further call on them to commence negotiations immediately with the NUM on how to remove this hated system. Should they fail to heed our call, they will have to face the mass struggles on the mines for control. They can take the view of ignoring the NUM, in the same way the Apartheid government has ignored the calls made by the oppressed people. There are two options: either negotiations start with the NUM to begin the process of dismantling

the migrant labour system, and establish workers' control of the hostels, or, the mineworkers seize control without their involvement. To refuse to negotiate will be at their peril.

In our campaign to remove migrant labour and the hostel system, we have the support of COSATU, our federation, and all other democratic forces.

The death of over 130 miners in violence must be laid at the door of the mineowners. It is clear that miners' belief that adequate protection will be given to them, while at work and in the hostel, was mistaken. Mine security, in some instances with the knowledge of management, have permitted armed thugs, vigilantes and people hostile to the NUM to commit acts of assault and death.

The security and defence of our members has now become a priority. We are calling on mineworkers to take their security and safety into their own hands. They cannot rely on the mine management any longer. Defence committees of mineworkers must be established on every mine to guarantee the safety of all workers against attacks.

Let us consolidate our organisation to defend our members and all mineworkers.

Let us take control of the hostel as the first step to destroy this evil system.

Let us mobilise for action the broadest unity to remove the migrant labour system.

Health and safety

Comrades in spite of the massive profits made by the mining industry, very little is spent on safety. Last year 177 comrades died at Kinross Gold Mine. Death, it seems, has become a feature of mining life. It is only when disasters such as Kinross strikes that everyone takes notice of the safety in the mines. But, we cannot accept this situation.

One more death, is a death too many. And despite the many deaths, the Chamber of Mines refuses to negotiate safety with the NUM. Once again, it shows the way the mine employers want to run the mines without regard for the workers organisation.

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The NUM has already accepted the Miners' Bill of Rights and this will be our loadstar during the health and safety campaign. 1987 is the year we fight for control over safety and health. There will be no retreat on this front.

Living wage campaign

Comrades, there can be no doubt that mineworkers do some of the most dangerous jobs. Yet we earn the lowest wages in the country with the exception of farmworkers. While the mineowners have made millions and millions in profit, we slave for wages which do not allow us to feed, cloth and house our families. In short, we cannot live a decent life.

Comrades, we cannot stand back any longer on this matter. The wealth in the mining industry is produced by our sweat and toil. We showed earlier that the crisis in the country is not one of profitability. The mining industry can pay living wages.

Through organisation we should make 1987 the year we put up wages significantly. Our living wage campaign, together with all COSATU unions, must mobilise every mine into action.

Volunteers for our campaign committees must come forward and build united action in every shaft, mine hostel room and block. The campaign for a living wage is the first phase of our struggle for a better distribution of the wealth of this country. It can never be our solution. As was pointed out, the nature of the crisis in the economy cannot be solved by this government or any capitalist government. Only a democratic socialist order which uses the country's resources for the benefit of its people and not profit will solve the crisis.

Comrades, there are many resolutions which will be discussed in the next few days. Our fight against repatriation, the building of regional mineworkers unity to fight multinational corporations and imperialism in the sub-continent, our energy policy, mechanisation and retrenchment and lastly our political policy will need serious discussion. Let us leave our mark with a clear vision of where we are going in 1987.

Conclusion

Comrades, the answer to our problems on the mines is clear. We

need to take control. 1987 is the year we march in that direction. It is in line with the general march by the oppressed people in this country. From what I have said a few things should be clear.

Under capitalism we will never find a solution to our problems. It is only with a democratic socialist South Africa that the working class and all the oppressed people will have the wealth which they produce under their control.

But to move in that direction requires organisation of the mass of people. Trade unions on their own cannot achieve this task. Although it is a vital force in the overall struggle, our youth, women and communities must be organised and strengthened. As miners and workers we must champion the struggle.

We must build firm, disciplined and effective alliances with the democratic organisations, which have proved in struggle their willingness to sacrifice. In general as part of the working class movement we should present the interests of the oppressed and exploited workers as the general interests of the oppressed people. We should build the vision in which our rights, freedoms, and the advancement of all the working people is guaranteed.

It is only through democratic organisation armed with a revolutionary vision and the courage for action that will bring freedom nearer. Let us not shirk that task as mineworkers. 1987 is the year we take control and build for that future.

Forward to democracy and socialism!
Forward with the workers struggle!
Forward to victory!

NUM congress: political resolution

Congress noting that:

- 1.1 The unity of mineworkers in particular and workers in general as part of the working class is of paramount importance and a threat to the evil system of apartheid and capitalism;
- 1.2 The workers in this country are not only striving for better working conditions in the mines, but for a democratic

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socialist society controlled by the working class.

- 1.3 The present form of government is based on racial oppression and the brutal exploitation of the democratic majority;
- 1.4 The workers' struggle in the mines cannot be separated from the struggle in the community;
- 1.5 There are other progressive organisations fighting the same battle against oppression and exploitation (e.g. students' struggle for people's education, community organisations fighting against rent which people cannot afford);
- 1.6 Apartheid and capitalism are two inseparable evils that must be smashed;
- 1.7 The Congress of the people which was held in Kliptown on 26 June 1955 was representative of all the patriotic forces in our country when the Congress adopted a programme of minimum demands which came to be known as the Freedom Charter;
- 1.8 That the Political Policy adopted by COSATU, that COSATU should not affiliate to any political organisation but should co-operate with other progressive organisations has caused confusion as many organisations claim to be progressive, resulting in many elements exploiting that situation.
- 1.9 Due to the confusion that has arisen within COSATU and its affiliates regarding the definition of progressive organisations we should co-operate with, it has become imperative that such organisations should be clearly defined.

Congress therefore resolves that:

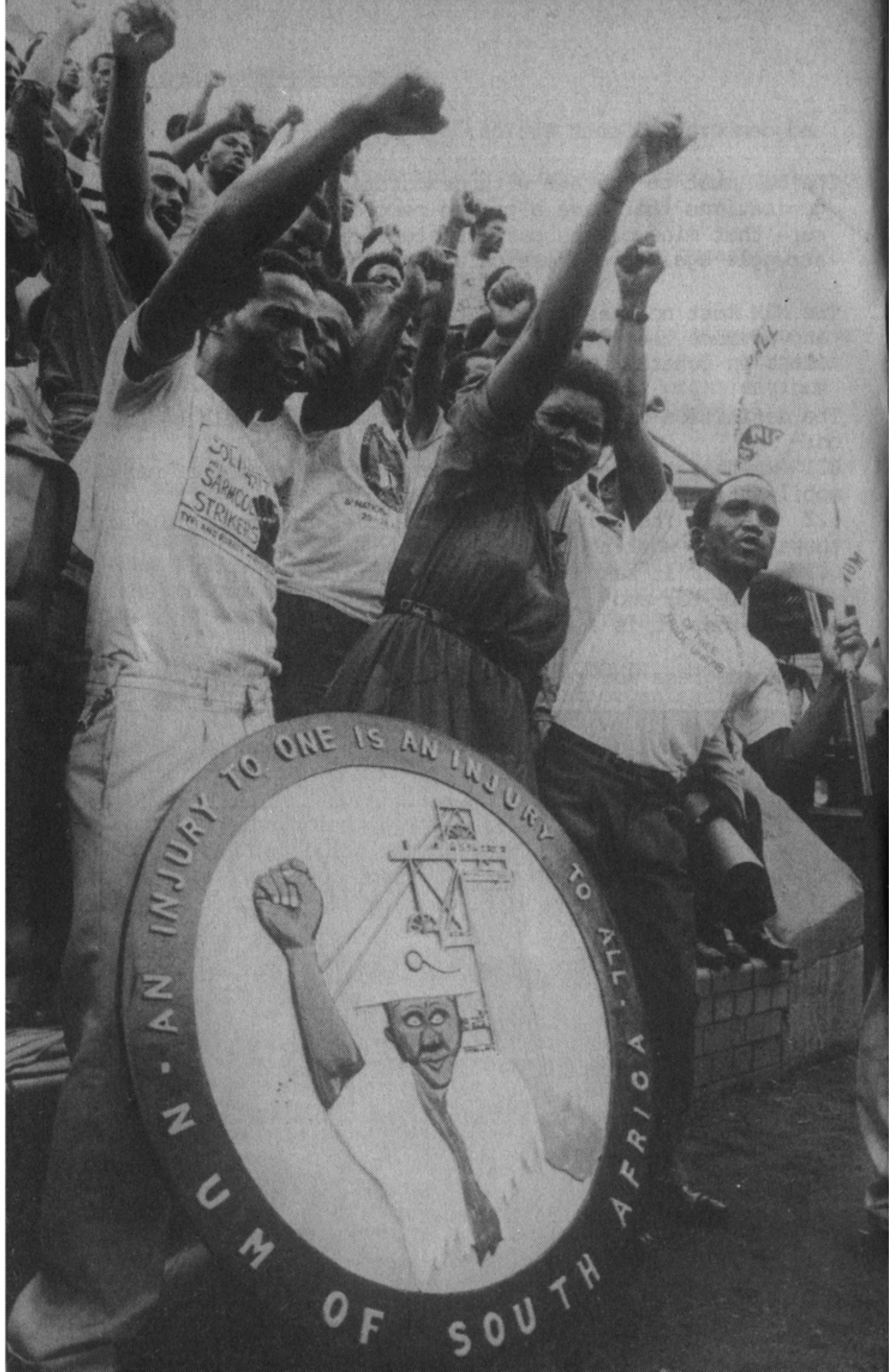
1. The Freedom Charter as adopted by the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955, is hereby recognised as a guiding document in our struggle from national oppression and economic exploitation;
2. All mineworkers should be united under the constitution and political policy of the NUM and COSATU;
3. The NUM and the organised working class in COSATU must play their historic leading role in the struggle for a non-racial

and democratic South Africa;

4. The NUM must co-operate with democratic and progressive organisations that have a proven record of struggle and make sure that mineworkers participate effectively in the struggle against oppression and exploitation;
- The NUM must not hesitate to take political action to defend and advance the interests of its members and the working class in general;
- The definition of progressive organisations should be based on:-
 - 6.1 whether the organisation has a proven record of mass mobilisation and action in our struggle;
 - 6.2 whether its principles and policies are compatible with those of the working class;
 - 6.3 whether it has a mass based constituency it is answerable to; and
 - 6.4 whether it is a democratic organisation.

photos: NUM congress and rally 25.2.87 - 1.3.87 (Afrapix)





SOLIDARITY
WITH THE
SARWOL
STRIKERS
THEY ARE FIGHTING

NUMERUM OF SOUTH AFRICA

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Errors of workerism

Isizwe*

Workerism is an ideology that has existed at different times in different parts of the world. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, workerism was one of the false approaches that the new, international workers' movement had to deal with and criticise. There were many important debates within workers' parties, trade unions and later with national liberation movements concerning workerism. We in South Africa can learn a great deal from a study of these historical criticisms. In this article we will be more concerned with local versions of workerism.

As the name shows, workerism concentrates more or less narrowly on the working class. Workerism correctly states that this class is the most progressive class in capitalist societies. But workerism then clings to this truth in a very mechanical, one-sided way.

Depending on the time or place, workerism has some or all of the following features. In the first place workerism is suspicious of all issues that are not "pure" working class issues. What is more, workerism tends to have a very narrow idea of working class concerns. It tends to think mainly of factory based struggles over wages and working conditions. These are the really important problems for workerism. Insofar as other issues, beyond the point of production (beyond the factory) are taken up, these are seen as secondary matters. This means that workerism tends to under-rate the very important struggle for state power. By state power we mean control over the police, army, courts, parliament and administration.

Workerism also tends to be highly suspicious of any kind of popular alliance, and of any struggle that involves more than just the working class. In fact nowhere in the world has the working class achieved victory without large numbers of allies among other groups. Where the working class has won power, it has always had to fight against the ideology of workerism, which seeks to isolate the workers. Despite this history, and despite many examples of

* from Isizwe - the Nation, journal of the UDF, 1.3, November 1986

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its weaknesses, workerism still lifts its head from time to time.

In the last 10 to 15 years we have seen the emergence of a fairly strong workerist current in South Africa. Before we look more closely at this tendency, we need to understand the particular, historical conditions that made this development possible.

Re-emergence of progressive trade unions

It was the progressive trade unions that were the first genuine mass-based, progressive organisations to emerge in South Africa after the terrible repression of the 1960's.

The beginnings of this re-emergence date back to 1973. In that year a 100,000 workers went on strike in the Durban area. This wave of strikes set the pace. Unions began to re-emerge over the next years in all the major urban centres. The main participants in these developments were:

1. The workers themselves;
2. Veteran worker leaders from the earlier SACTU [South African Congress of Trade Unions] period some of whom at that time had recently been released from political imprisonment;
3. Young intellectuals, many (but not all) white, coming from the universities.

In considering the development of workerism, this third group needs to be looked at more closely. These young intellectuals made an important contribution in the early years of rebuilding progressive trade unions. They assisted with advice, research, resources and organisational skills. The ideological background of many of these intellectuals was an "academic" or "legal marxism". This brand of "marxism" had been learnt from university books, and not been sharpened and tested in mass struggle. (Of course this was not the fault of the intellectuals in question. It was not easy for them to develop progressive ideas, except through small reading groups in the heavy repression of the early 1970s.) This "academic marxism" was very European in character. It was not rooted in the South African struggle. Looking back, one person from that time has said: "I read many thick marxist books. They were about Britain and France. I knew all about difficult economic theories before I had even heard about the Freedom Charter, or of SACTU's pound-a-day campaign of the 1950s."

As mass union organisation grew in the later 1970's some intellectuals in this group changed and deepened their outlook. They came to understand the history of our struggle, its traditions, and its strategies and tactics. But the outlook of some others continued to be heavily marked by their university background. It was this last group that became the most active ideologists of workerism.

Debates within the trade unions

A number of debates happened in the mid 1970s in and around the new trade unions. One debate concerned the question of trade unions and political involvement. Some argued that the re-emerged trade unions should not get involved in politics. They said that trade unions' best chance of survival and of growth was to concentrate narrowly on labour issues.

We must remember in this period of the early 1970s, the apartheid regime and the bosses were going all out to smash the new emerging trade unions. They were trying to impose instead dummy liaison committees. At this time, the progressive trade unions were quite small and inexperienced.

After the massive country wide struggles 1976-1977, the apartheid government retreated on the trade union front. The government and the bosses were scared that the popular militancy, especially of the youth, would "infect" the new trade union movement.

The ruling class abandoned the liaison committees and went for a different approach. They decided to recognise the new trade unions, and in this way they hoped to tame them. They hoped that by recognising the trade unions it would keep them free from politics.

In fact, this new approach did not really work. Instead it made a lot more space for progressive trade union work. It was, in practice, an important victory for the South african working class and its organisations.

For some workerists, this victory was seen as a victory for the strategy of narrow trade union work, by slowly pushing back the government and bosses by the careful building of trade union structures, and by not getting involved in "political adventures". Of course what argument this completely ignores is the massive effect that the 1976-77 uprisings had on forcing the apartheid

- workerism -

government and bosses back into making some reforms. Over 1,000 people, mostly students and young workers, died in the struggles of 1976-77. The emerging trade union movement is one of the living monuments to these martyrs.

This newly opened space on the labour front was used effectively by the workers and their trade union leadership. By 1979, a new national trade union federation, FOSATU [Federation of South African Workers], was launched. Alongside FOSATU, SAAWU [South African Allied Workers Union] and many other trade unions also grew in strength.

The main feature of this short background history is that the working class movement re-emerged largely as a trade union movement.

This happened in a situation where there was little, if any, open mass-based political organisation in the people's camp. It was only in the early 1980s that progressive civics, youth congresses and women's organisations began to emerge. It was only in August 1983, with the launch of the UDF, that a truly national, political voice existed at an open level. By this stage, the re-emerged trade union movement had been in existence for some 10 years. It was in this situation, with a labour movement operating more or less independently of mass political struggle, that workerism developed.

A warning

A word of warning before we look more closely at the details of workerism. Too often we use the words "populism" and "workerism" as loose, sectarian slogans. Too often we label someone, or some group or organisation "workerist" and then we imagine we can dismiss them. But this is not so.

In fact, individuals and organisations with workerist tendencies have made contributions to our struggle in the last 15 years. In criticising the errors of workerism, we must also learn what we can from the strong points in theory and in organisation of those who have workerist tendencies. We must seek to win them over to our position.

It is also important to note that when we use the word "tendency", we mean exactly that. Today you will find only a few pure

workerists. But you will find the outlook and errors of workerism creeping in as a tendency in quite a few places. Our own UDF ranks have not been free of workerist tendencies.

There have been three broad forms of workerism in South Africa over the last 15 years.

1. Workerism as economism

We have already spoken of 1973 and the debates that surrounded the new trade unions. The debates were whether the unions should get involved in politics. Some, but not all intellectuals associated with trade unions argued that the unions should not get involved. Generally, at this stage, this view was presented as a tactic for the particular time. It was as we have said, a period when the unions were still weak and small. It is possible that this low profile, narrow trade union, factory floor approach was, then, the correct tactic. In any case, as long as this approach was seen strictly, as a tactic and not as a general principle, then it is not really correct to describe it as workerism.

But many of those pushing this tactic of "independence" for trade unions in the early 1970s, soon began to develop a more elaborated theory - this was the ideology of economism.

by economism, we mean that brand of workerism that has argued that the "economy" is the key to everything. This position argues that in a capitalist economy like South Africa everything can be explained by capitalist relations of production - that is, by the exploitation of workers by bosses.

Now there is a lot of truth in this view. Unfortunately, this important truth is advanced by economism as if it were the whole truth, and the only truth. As a result, it argues that the only real important struggle is on the factory floor. It is in the factory that the workers and bosses confront each other most purely. This struggle is the key to everything else.

Workerists who advance this brand of economism tend to dismiss the political struggle as not so important. They see apartheid oppression as simply a mask behind which capitalist exploitation is hidden. For these workerists, struggles around who shall govern, and against apartheid oppression generally are not really important. They say such struggles have the danger of misleading workers away

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from the "real" struggle, the "pure" class struggle in the factory. Insofar as these more political struggles are taken up, they are useful only if they uncover to the workers the truth about capitalist exploitation. It is in production, they say, that the real power is located. If workers can change the system of production, if they can take over the factories and get rid of the bosses, then the apartheid government will crumble.

This economistic workerism is not all wrong. It is true that the power of the ruling class, of the bosses, rests very much on the exploitation of the workers at the point of production, in the factories. It is also true that meaningful change in our country will not come simply by removing apartheid. Full democracy for South Africa depends importantly on removing exploitation from our economy.

(this, incidentally, is why the UDF has committed itself to fighting all forms of oppression and exploitation.)

But economism takes these truths and turns them in to the whole truth. In this way, it tends to ignore the great importance of political questions. The factory is not the only place where the ruling class has power. Without an oppressive political machinery (police, army, courts, jails, administration) the bosses would not be able to continue for one single day their exploitation of the workers in the factory. In our country apartheid oppression, (things like gutter education, pass laws, job reservations, the bantustans) deepen the capitalist exploitation and control over workers, and also over all the oppressed.

While factory based struggles are of great importance, a complete strategy for change cannot simply rest at this level. What does it help a worker to win wage increases, if these are wiped out by more sales tax and higher rents introduced by the white minority regime?

Even from a "pure" working class and economic position, it is completely wrong to limit workers to factory based issues. The questions of politics, of who holds state power, of who makes the laws, of who controls the police, the courts, the army, prisons and administration cannot be ignored. Without addressing these questions the factory-based gains made by the workers will always be in danger of being wiped out.

With the upsurge of massive political struggles in South Africa over the last two years, the weaknesses of economism have been widely understood by workers, and most other progressives.

While economism still lingers on in some places, it has generally been abandoned, or adapted and reformed. One reformed brand of economism can be called syndicalism.

2. Workerism as syndicalism

This syndicalist brand of workerism does not deny the need for workers to get involved in wider political issues. But it sees the trade union as the main, or even as the only organisational base for this political involvement.

There are some reformist as well as more militant versions of this syndicalism. The reformist version hopes for some movement or party modelled on the British Labour Party to emerge. The trade union movement would be the main participant in such a labour movement. For the reformist, struggle is limited to the struggle to improve conditions, without ending our enslavement. More militant versions of this syndicalism see the trade unions as the spear head of attack on the apartheid government and bourgeois rule. In this case the chosen strategy is the general strike. In fact, the general strike tends to be stressed by these militant syndicalists to the exclusion of all other weapons of struggle. The general strike is seen in isolation from all other strategies and tactics.

Both the reformist and militant versions of syndicalism have one thing in common. They both think that the leading role of the working class means the leading role of the progressive trade unions.

But the leading role of the working class in our struggle is not the same thing as the leading role of the progressive trade unions. To understand why we say this, and to understand more clearly the errors of syndicalism, we need to look at the strengths and weaknesses of trade unions.

The strengths and weaknesses of trade unions

Trade unions have made, and they will continue to make, a great contribution to the whole liberation movement. It is often within

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trade unions that workers begin to learn of their collective strength as a class. The trade union struggles enable workers to understand more clearly that their interests and those of the bosses are fundamentally opposed. In democratic trade unions, hundreds of thousands of South African workers get organisational training. They take part in discussions, elections, mandating and representing. The trade unions are a great school of struggle for workers. It is in the interest of the UDF and the whole national democratic struggle in South Africa that the maximum number of workers is organised into democratic, national, industrial trade unions.

The trade unions are also more than just a school of struggle. They are in their own right, powerful weapons, enabling workers to strike heavy blows against the bosses and against the whole apartheid system.

But trade unions have limitations. The first aim of a trade union is to organise the maximum number of workers in a factory, and eventually within an industry.

Its means of mobilisation and organisation is around the immediate factory floor issues - like wages and working conditions. If this is the first aim of a progressive trade union, then it would be incorrect to exclude workers who say they are "not interested in politics", or who have many different, even confused political views. In South Africa, the progressive trade unions often include many ordinary workers who are not political, or who are, for instance, Inkatha members. Many of these workers are, nevertheless, loyal union members.

It is completely correct that the progressive trade unions should throw their net wide. They would be failing in their task if they excluded an ordinary worker because he or she has confused political views. This is not say that trade unions should make no effort to educate their members politically. But this is a process, something that can take time. By throwing their net wide, and by exposing thousands of workers to democratic organisation and collective, militant struggle, the trade unions can act as a major link between the working class and political organisations and struggle.

What we have just said about trade unions shows why unions have political limitations. This is not the fault of trade unions. They

would, in fact, be failing in their political task if they tried to become political parties open only to the most politically advanced workers with the same programme and outlook.

Because they recruit widely, trade unions are often not able to move quickly and effectively in day to day political struggles. The political mandates of officials are often more limited than those of political organisations, where the voluntary members have already agreed to a political programme.

But we must not take this argument too far!

Over the years, the progressive trade unions in South Africa have played an important political role. Unfortunately the political contribution of trade unions in the last period could sometimes have been much greater. The reasons for this have not always been the fundamental limitations of trade unions themselves. Often workerism has held back the fullest participation of the organised workers in our struggles. However, since the launch of COSATU at the end of last year, we have seen a bolder political approach. This represents a very big gain for the whole struggle.

So far, we have considered two brands of workerism - economism and syndicalism. We have suggested that these forms of workerism have been closely associated with certain intellectuals linked to the trade union movement. The soil for the development of this workerist outlook has been a trade union movement emerging in the absence of a large, open political organisation. But the errors of workerism are not confined to some of those who have been closely associated with the trade unions over the last period. There is a third, watered down version of workerism that we need finally to consider.

3. Workerism in national democratic clothing

This brand of watered down workerism is found within our own UDF ranks, and elsewhere. This brand of workerism shares many of the errors of the other brands of workerism, but in a watered down, not so strong form.

We are thinking here of those who pay lip service to our broad strategy of national democratic struggle. That is, those who say, "Yes, the popular struggle, NDS is important." But they do not really believe these words in their hearts. For these watered down

workerists the national democratic struggle is simply a tactic of the moment. For them the broad front of the UDF is an unfortunate and temporary structure. Our talk about national democratic struggle is "merely a concession to the traditions and culture of the masses in South Africa". These workerists in NDS clothing would like to see the UDF become a socialist, worker's party. They would like to see the petty bourgeoisie and all those democrats who are not socialist "weeded out" from our ranks.

Those who still argue in this way have learnt very little from the experience of the past two years. In the short space of its existence, the UDF has paved the way for countrywide mass mobilisation, and organisation. These lessons have confirmed once more, in the hard school of struggle, the correctness of our broad strategy of national democratic struggle. The UDF sees as its main task the mobilisation and organisation of all South Africans committed to non-racial, majority rule in an undivided South Africa. On the basis of this fundamental goal we have achieved major victories.

For those within our ranks who are committed to socialism, these victories have created the space and possibilities of raising the question of socialism not within the confines of a narrow, small sect, but at a mass level. But there are also other patriotic democrats, which are not necessarily socialist, who are making a large contribution to the struggle. While encouraging debate and discussion about the nature of change in a future South Africa, we must also safeguard and deepen our unity.

The golden rule in a political struggle is always to isolate the most dangerous enemy, while at the same time strengthening to the maximum the progressive camp. In South African conditions, the broad strategy of national democratic struggle is the route to the most far-reaching and rapid changes in our country. It is not an unfortunate or delaying tactic, it is a broad strategy that we consider with the utmost seriousness.

there are many practical ways in which we can illustrate the strategic weakness of the watered down version of workerism. Let us take just one example. The watered down workerists have a very defeatist, passive attitude towards the oppressed, black petty bourgeoisie, and middle strata in our country. In the last few years these workerists have argued that the government's tricameral parliament and its Black Local Authorities system is designed to create a large collaborating "black middle class".

This is true. But from this correct understanding, these workerists have concluded that we must concentrate all our efforts on black workers.

In other words, because it is the government and bosses' intention to create a large, collaborating "black middle class", we are asked to believe that such a group must already exist. These workerists want to hand this victory over to the government and bosses without a fight!

Fortunately, the majority view within the UDF has not been swayed by this view. Guided by the broad strategy of national democratic struggle - in our million signature campaign, in our anti-election struggles, for instance - we have mobilised, informed and organised all classes and groups among the oppressed. We have to refuse to confine ourselves to factories and working class areas in the townships. Because of this, the government failed miserably in its attempts to gain significant support for its reforms among the black middle strata. It is true that there are some sell-outs and collaborators, but they are a small minority, and they are generally very isolated within our communities. We can say, confidently, that on this front, the government and bosses are further away from realising their dreams of a large collaborating group than they were in 1983.

The leading role of the working class

We have looked at three brands of workerism that have developed over the last 15 years. We have also looked at some of the errors and weaknesses within these three brands of workerism. In conclusion we need to consider the question of the leading role of the working class.

This is a point that all workerists stress a great deal. It is also on this point that they are most confused.

The workerists are not alone in calling for the leading role of the working class in our struggle. The entire UDF (in its national resolutions), COSATU, the ANC and many other organisations have recognised the need for working class leadership. For the UDF the problem with the workerists is not their correct call for worker leadership, but rather what they understand by this.

The economistic brand of workerism fails to realise that working

class leadership must be exerted in all fields of struggle. The position, outlook and discipline of the workers must provide direction not just within the confines of the factory - but also in the political struggles, in struggles against gutter education, and community oppression.

Likewise, the syndicalist brand of workerism tends to hold back workers from the fullest involvement in popular organisations and alliances. It is strange that the same workerist intellectuals who, in theory, praise the automatic wisdom of the working class, often have a very patronising view of workers in practice, in practice, these workerists think of the working class as weak and ignorant, constantly threatened by "populism" and "petty bourgeois nationalism". This is often the underlying reason for their syndicalism. They want to lock workers safely up within "pure working class" trade unions, holding them in quarantine until they are "sufficiently educated" to be able to stand up to the threats of "populism".

Insofar as workerists have succeeded in this aim of isolating workers within trade unions, they have achieved two negative results:

- a) They have deprived workers of political experience, of the chance to learn in and through political practice. It is not in standing off in isolation that workers will learn the strengths and weaknesses, the possibilities and limitations of other potential allies;
- b) They have deprived the national democratic struggle of strong worker leadership.

Fortunately, the attempt to fence organised workers inside a syndicalist compound has generally not succeeded. The two negative results have not been as far reaching as they might have been.

Finally, the most fundamental error of workerism in all three of its varieties, is its failure to understand that in South African conditions the working class can, and needs to exert its leadership over the broadest popular unity. Nowhere in the capitalist world, in a country with so many features of advanced capitalism, are the medium term prospects of the working class so good. In South Africa, the ruling block is able to secure support only from a small minority of our people. The special combination of racial oppression and capitalist exploitation has created a vast people's

camp struggling to remove all forms of oppression and exploitation from our land.

To ensure that our struggle is advanced to the maximum the working class needs increasingly to provide leadership not just to its own members - but to all democratic and oppressed South Africans - to the black middle strata, to the rural masses, to the unemployed, and to the youth. The errors of workerism (whether it is economism or syndicalism, or a watered down lip service to the national democratic struggle) holds us all back. But above all, it holds back the working class itself, from the fullest realisation of its important tasks.

Errors of workerism: a response

Two trade unionists

1. Introduction

This response is not a defense of workerism. However it takes issue with a number of points raised in the article "Errors of Workerism", in the UDF Journal, Isizwe (1) (reproduced in this edition).

This article is published at a time when South Africa is facing a severe political, economic and social crisis. The ruling classes are finding it increasingly difficult to rule in the old way. The governments' right to rule is questioned, mass unemployment exists with approximately 6 million people unemployed and social insecurity and poverty are common features of South Africa today.

In response to this crisis, the state and the bosses have resorted to naked and brutal repression. This is evident in the re-imposing of the second State of Emergency, increased press curbs and a blatant violation of basic human rights. Many organisations involved in resistance are debating ways in which to fight apartheid and capitalism. This article is part of that debate and is intended to add to the discussion on the role of the working class in the struggle for liberation.

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"Errors of Workerism" correctly warns of the danger that workerism could have for the South African struggle. But, it must be mentioned that despite the value of the article, it is in part vague and makes some generalisations which need to be analysed.

2. "Workerism" and socialism

The author defines workerism as follows:

- (i) that it concentrates narrowly on the working class;
- (2) (ii) that it focuses mainly on factory-based struggles over wages and working conditions;
- (3) and (iii) workerism under-rates the very important struggle for state power.

We agree with the above-mentioned definition of workerism. However, "workerism" in South Africa has not been actively appropriated by any group as a definition of its ideology. Rather it has been applied - with negative connotations - to people and organisations arguing for socialism and against the theory that socialism will be reached in two-stages.

Socialism is not concerned exclusively with the working class. Rather it promises a better material life for the oppressed majority in South Africa. Secondly, socialism seeks to democratise every sphere of life (ie. factory, community, sports, education, culture, etc.) and not only the factory. Thirdly, socialism is essentially concerned with state power. Whilst emphasising the need for a pre-figurative politics in the here and now in our struggles, (which touches on the issue of state power in itself), it is common knowledge for socialists that the state is the decisive nucleus of power in any capitalist society. Thus the struggle for socialism will always be under constant threat if the struggle for state power is neglected. However, we refuse to counterpose the importance of everyday struggles to that of state power as today's struggles and the structures and practices are of crucial concern for a post-apartheid South Africa. Instead of counterposing the two, we hold the view that both are equally important.

As we have said the label "workerism" is used as a smear to discredit many socialists. If the intention of the authors was to attack genuinely workerist tendencies in the liberation struggle then we stand fully behind them. If this is not the case - and the

term "workerism" is being used as a smear - then the result will be to hinder open debate on the nature of the South African struggle, the role of the working class, the struggles for socialism, etc. In correctly criticising workerism, the authors should not ignore the growing debate around the struggle for socialism.

3. The new unions

Having presented their definition of "workerism" the author argues that it (workerism) was initiated by the "academic marxism" which accompanied the birth of the progressive trade unions in the post-1973 era. The main actors in the re-emergence of the progressive trade unions are identified as follows:

- (1) the workers themselves;
- (2) the veteran worker leaders from the earlier SACTU period some of whom at that time had recently been released from political imprisonment; and
-) young university based intellectuals of whom many - though not all - were white.

was this latter group, we are told, that became the most active ideologists of workerism.

These allegations can be questioned, particularly because the analysis of the re-emergence of progressive trade unions is at best cursory, functionalist and simplistic.

It is correctly stated that the birth of the progressive trade unions can be traced back to the historic Durban mass strikes of 1973. (4) The main pillars of the progressive trade unions rested upon the wages commissions set up by NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) on numerous English campuses. It was through the handling of menial but very important complaints, payslips, Workmen's Compensation, UIF, etc., that these activists had some influence amongst the workers.

This is a far cry from gaining influence through academic studies, not tested in mass struggle or through "Academic Marxism" which was not rooted in the South African struggle. (5) As trade unionists we know that workers do not support trade unions because of abstract ideas but through active day to day struggle and through the experience of winning real material benefits.

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After the historic 1973 strikes democratic trade unions were born. Rather than "Academic marxism" giving rise to mass democratic shopfloor organisation in the factory as the authors imply, it was the merging of theory and practice that assisted in the building of worker power.

The merging of theory and practice was also inspired by the work of the assassinated political scientist Rick Turner. His book, "Eye of the Needle", also represented a significant break from the structural-functionalist marxism which was dominant internationally and locally in the 1970s.

One suspects that there is another reason for the author's contempt for what is called "Academic Marxism". Perhaps it is because it opened up new areas of debate on the development of trade unions in South Africa and the role they should play in the national liberation struggle - which inevitably meant a critical evaluation of SACTU. It is quite true that discussions on SACTU and its strategy of working in the Congress Alliance did mark the thinking of some of the activists involved in the unions. The opinion of some of these activists was that SACTU subordinated the workers' struggle for socialism to the demands and campaigns of the Congress Alliance and the National Democratic Struggle. (6) In addition, the severe repression of the post-Sharpeville era, coupled with the lessons of what these activists saw were SACTU's strategic failings inspired a strategy of survival and growth concentrating narrowly on labour issues.

Hence, far from "Academic Marxism" being decisive in carving out the path of development of the unions, it was the historical climate and the critical reflections on SACTU, that were the decisive factors in debating strategy.

3. Wiehahn open sesame - Enter the unions

The struggle by black workers to have their unions legally recognised is given scant attention by the author. This oversight has grave political implications. It demonstrates a lack of understanding of the worker struggles on the labour front and the gains that have thus far been made.

It is well-known that for many years black workers have struggled for the right to form their own trade unions. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1925 excluded African workers from the definition

of employee. After 1973 the worker's struggle to have their unions recognised was revived. During 1975 -1978 many workers struck for the right to form democratic trade unions. One of the most important - and brutal - strikes was that at Heineman Electric in March 1976. Workers, including pregnant women, were beaten up by the police. The organisers, G Anderson and S Kubheka, did not escape the brutality of the police. Many such cases are on record. Hemson (7) records that in 1975 the police intervened in 61 cases of strike action, prosecuting 503 workers. The statement that "the ruling class abandoned the liaison committees and went for a different approach" (8) does not do justice to the long and bitter struggle of the workers which put strong pressure on the ruling classes.

To our knowledge it was the workers who resisted the liaison committees and made them unworkable - thereby forcing the ruling class to introduce Wiehahn.

The functionalism of the author does not stop here. Again we read "they (the state) decided to recognise the new trade unions and in this way they hoped to tame them. They hoped that by recognising the trade unions it would keep them from politics." (9)

Once more it is important to note that this was not a one-directional process. Workers did not merely accept state decisions.

The debate in the trade unions that arose around Wiehahn can be described as one of the most open in South African labour history. (10) The then existing trade union federation, FOSATU, only agreed to register with the state if the provisional registration clause was dropped, if non-racial organisation in law was upheld and if migrant workers were allowed to belong to trade unions.

Today, it is largely acknowledged that the intention of control imprinted in Wiehahn was not met. Rather the unions scored a major victory in forcing the state to drop the provisional registration clause, allowing non-racial organisation of workers and allowing migrant workers to belong to registered trade unions. Migrant workers today, constitute not only the backbone of the South African economy, but have also proved to be some of the most militant workers.

Reading further, we are informed that: "the state's new approach

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... made a lot of space for progressive trade union work". (11) These spaces are not defined. More importantly however, "spaces" are a result of struggle. It is a credit to the resilient hardworking and critical strategists of the labour movement that this space was utilised. The way in which such spaces are used to further the interests of workers is important. To argue that the state's new approach made space for the trade unions undervalues the role of the union movement in creating this space and forcing concessions from the state.

It is acknowledged that the UDF since its inception has made great advances in mobilisation and organisation - especially in the countryside. (12) However, it would appear that the author is claiming more than this in arguing the UDF's various activities have created the space and possibilities of raising socialism at a mass level. (13) Those who articulate a struggle for socialism, it is implied, are confined to a narrow sect. We shall not ask as to which activities of the UDF have raised the question of socialism, but just mention that organisations like MAWU and COSATU have concretely raised the question of socialism at a mass level.

4. The working class movement and the progressive trade union movement.

We agree that the working class movement emerged largely as a trade union movement. Unfortunately, the author does not tell us what they mean by the working class movement. We believe that it is necessary to define what we mean by working class movement before proceeding any further. It is our contention that the trade union movement is one of the principal pillars of the working class movement, but in itself does not constitute the working class movement. We argue that civic organisations, unemployment organisations, youth-student, sports and womens organisations are integral components of the working class movement.

In attempting to trace the historic origins of "workerism", the author mentions that: "it was ... with a labour movement operating more or less independently of mass political struggle that workerism developed". (14)

This statement forms the basis for equating independence with "economism". It is argued that "many of those pushing the tactic of independence" for trade unions in the early 1970s soon began to develop a more elaborated theory - this was the ideology of

economism. (15)

We do not believe that the absence or presence of mass political and community organisations negates the principle of trade union independence. In South Africa today, with a proliferation of mass organisations "independence" is enshrined in the resolutions of many unions organisations, including COSATU.

Unions and workers - in interacting with community organisations and political organisations - have realised that worker independence can never be sacrificed until new organisations develop/emerge where the principles and practices that workers have nurtured in their unions are adhered to.

The absence of mass political organisations when the progressive trade unions emerged, did not give rise to workerism as the author contends. The struggles of the unions in many ways influenced the wider political struggles. The struggle for the establishment of SRC's in schools was compared to the democratic shop-steward committees of the workers in the factories. Victories in the industrial arena, pressurised the state to introduce parallel reforms. Hence the so-called political reforms in the post-1982 era: the Black Local Authorities Act, the Tricameral Parliament, etc. History records that, through the widespread mobilisation spearheaded by the UDF, these state "reforms" lie in ruins.

In recognising and arguing that the gains of workers on the labour front enhanced the possibilities for similar advances in other spheres of struggle, this is not deterministic and does not mean that victories in the economic sphere will determine the future course of development in the political arena. Rather we hold the view that struggles on the labour, political and educational front are linked, that a reciprocal relationship exists between them and that advances in one particular arena of struggle do not automatically determine the outcome of struggle in other spheres.

a) The working class and trade unions

The author correctly mentions that there was a position which held that issues outside the factory were secondary. This position also failed to confront the issue of state power. This was the syndicalist influence within some FOSATU unions. There were other unions and activists who argued against the syndicalist current, but also opposed joint actions with community organisations on the

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basis that they were under "petty-bourgeois control". They also positively identified the workplace as the place to forge non-racial solidarity as opposed to any multi-racial solidarity which the Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act, etc., nurtured. (16)

However, the most serious criticism against joint actions with community organisations was that they - the community organisations - often operated undemocratically.

b) Community organisations, trade unions and political struggles

It was the now merged Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), in a period of less intense crisis, where a passionate call was issued for a "workable relationship between trade unions and community organisations." (17) This article predated the formation of the UDF and correctly anticipated the potential stumbling blocks in the relationship between community organisations and trade unions when attempting to embark on joint action. Many of the issues raised then have not been fully confronted and dealt with in theory and practice. The arguments put forward by FCWU then, are still valid today and it is worth repeating them to counter the allegation that the "organised working class did not fully participate in the broader political struggle because of "workerist" influences". (18)

FCWU argued that unions were often invited to attend meetings at short notice and this did not give union officials enough time to consult their membership. The involvement of trade unions was often sought without them being fully involved or having any knowledge of the programme. As a result they often attended meetings which could end up implicating them in activities on which they had no mandate from their members. (19)

Also, many of the groups and organisations invited to meetings were often not weighed up in terms of their representivity. Any small organisation could attend and end up having the same voting power as organisations with a large constituency. Hence, organisations with no stable constituency could direct the meeting to make decisions thus prejudging the organised constituencies of the unions.

Thus, when the author alleges workers refrained from politics because of "workerist" influences, this does not deal with all the

issues involved and perhaps ignores important attempts by some unions - eg. FCWU and GWU - which were not against community and political involvement, but against a particular kind of politics. Workers and their unions have been and still are grappling with the question as to how do organised workers participate in the broader political struggles in a way which will not sacrifice the leadership of the working class. The fears of the unions were two-fold:

- (i) what structure for democracy existed in the community or organisations, and
- (ii) the fear of the hijacking of those campaigns for some sectarian programme or organisation and not to the benefit of the workers struggles.

These problems are real and are still with us today - eg. the events of the Port Elizabeth and East London March 1985 stayaway. (20) Here decisions to call for a stayaway were taken by community organisations and youth and political organisations without first consulting with the organised workers and their trade unions.

The unions are only drawn in after decisions have been taken. This is one of the major problems between unions, political organisations and community organisations and has to be resolved if conflict between the various constituencies of the working class movement is to be resolved in favour of a genuine workable relationship.

5. The role of trade unions and democracy

We agree that trade unions have political limitations in that they cannot act as political parties. But the reasons put forward by the author for the limitations of the trade unions' political role are not convincing.

It is our contention that the author has a Eurocentric understanding of trade unions political limitations. The combination of racial oppression and capitalist exploitation has not only created a 'vast people's camp' but has made it impossible for trade unions in South Africa to be limited to factory floor issues only. Comparative examples of unions in Poland, Bolivia, Brazil and Chile in some way negates the arguments regarding trade unions' inherent political limitations. Unions operating as social movements such as Solidarity in Poland cannot be ignored.

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Furthermore, trade unions do have some positive political contribution to make in that they structured. They seek to cover all workers in an industry irrespective of ideological differences. It is within this forum that political views are exchanged and debated. Divergent views are measured against the principle of workers control and the other founding principles of COSATU. Even if this process does not guarantee, a homogeneous and evenly balanced political viewpoint, it certainly does provide the possibility for workers to develop a common political understanding.

It can also be argued that the democracy prevalent in the progressive trade unions is essentially socialist in substance, and we do not accept the argument "because they recruit widely, trade unions are not often able to move quickly and effectively in day to day political struggles ... and that the political mandates of officials are often more limited than those of political organisations where the voluntary members have already agreed to a political programme." (21)

The practices of getting mandates, regular report-backs, accountability of leaders, democratic mass discussion are all part of the historical debate around socialist practice and have been implemented by the progressive trade union movement. One can legitimately question whether political organisations not only accepted in theory these elements of socialism but whether it is being practiced.

6. The leading role of the working class

We found this section of the article the least stimulating and most underdeveloped part of the paper. The author argues that "the leading role of the working class does not mean the leading role of the progressive trade unions." (22) This is where they stop. They do not inform us as to who should lead the working class.

Nevertheless, it is instructive to note why is it in South Africa that working class leadership has been interpreted by so-called "workerists" as meaning the leadership of the progressive trade unions. The reasons are largely historical and social. For in the aftermath of the vicious repression in 1960 and 1976, the unions were the only organisations that managed to build, nurture and sustain structures which were and still are worker controlled. The unions provided workers with a voice, and an organisational base from which to struggles for their rights and against racist

capitalism. In short workers speak through their organisations - the trade unions.

If the progressive trade union federations - through interaction with the other components of the working class movement - do not lead the entire working class then who will? Will it be the UDF or AZAPO? What are the problems with the progressive trade union federations leading the broad working class movement. Is it simply because of the dangers of sectionalism and sectarianism that beset the trade union movement in Britain for example, or is it because the progressive trade union federations are independent and not controlled by any political organisation. This statement does not deny the fact that political organisations do have an influence in the unions.

It is accepted that unions can hardly be equated with the working class movement as they represent one section of the working class. But it can also be argued that the unions are the working class movement's most powerful weapon. This is the case not because workers are the largest number amongst the oppressed people or they are poorer or morally superior to other groups and classes. Rather it is because:

- (i) workers have an objective interest in the dismantling of racial capitalism, and
- (ii) of the strategic role they play in production and the power that they have to withdraw their labour.

Even if the trade union movement is the most powerful weapon of the working class, it is imperative that alliances be set up with the students, youth, unemployed organisations, women and civic associations. As noted earlier, the link between the various parts of the working class movement have often been marked by conflict and tension and it is only in struggle that a workable relationship will result.

Once again it is argued that the working class must lead the struggle. But how does the working class lead. How is working class leadership made a concrete reality? We are in agreement with the author in criticising the theory of the automatic wisdom of the working class, or the idea which sees the working class as weak and ignorant and constantly threatened by "populism" and "petty-bourgeois nationalism". Again we do not agree that workers should be locked up safely within trade unions holding them in

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quarantine until are sufficiently educated to be able to stand up to the threats of populism. (23) The author rightly condemns these methods of building workers consciousness. This insulatory outlook to struggle has been one reason for sectional consciousness and sectarianism in the working class. But as said above, the author does not explain how the working class retains a leadership role since, as agreed, this does not happen automatically.

It is not enough to pass resolutions on the subject. It is not enough to have people from working class backgrounds in leadership positions. It is necessary to look at the content of the politics. It is well-known that there are reactionary trade unions and organisations such as UWUSA and Inkatha with the latter enjoying some support amongst workers. Only a clear socialist outlook amongst the mass militant section of the workers is a prerequisite if we want to sustain our victories towards a non-racial, democratic South Africa under workers control.

All working class militants argue that the working class must lead all democratic forces. Again no guidelines are provided. The starting point for the working class to provide leadership to the entire democratic people of South Africa we argue can best come through workers formulating a clear political programme indicating aims and demands. In this programme workers will explain their vision of the society they want and a programme that will rally all democratic-loving people behind it. In order to fulfill their leadership role workers must put forward what their goals are. They have to explain to their allies that liberation will not be complete until they as workers are liberated. They will have to explain to the small shopkeeper, the student, the vacillating petty-bourgeois that their salvation lies in throwing their lot with the workers. A workers programme will show them that their interests are being accommodated and in so doing win their support. It is in this way we believe that working class leadership can be extended and become a reality. In its absence, only lip-service will be paid to the notion of working class leadership.

7. The way forward

No revolutionary can profess to have the "line" on the way forward. Many activists are debating as to how the workers struggle can advance and consolidate itself so that it is not used by any other groups or classes.

One of the position holds that the workers struggle can best be secured against the threat of petty-bourgeois nationalism through the establishment of a workers party. This vanguard party will espouse pure working class politics, will be independent of nationalism and will give direction to everyday struggles. The problem with this approach is three-fold:

- (1) Its alleged "narrow left" position which posits that the party will be built of advanced elements (ie. intellectuals) and it does not accommodate the recent progressive traditions of open mass organisation such as trade unions - the mandate, report-backs, etc., mentioned earlier. Are these tenets of democracy to be wished away?
- (2) Secondly, what would the relationship be towards the major dominant political groupings that have a gravitational pull on the mass of workers in South Africa. Is it possible to wish away the popularity and support that these movements enjoy? Can it afford to be hostile? and
- (3) is it possible for one to talk of a pure working class politics that is rid of petty-bourgeois nationalism? Is there something like "pure working class politics".

This question is ridden with a number of problems and is far from settled. The political leadership that this party would provide would in all likelihood not emerge by gradually substituting itself for the major dominant political organisations. It would appear as an alternative to it, as a rival political leadership. The leadership of the dominant political organisations are quite aware of this - and would view such a project as an attempted challenge.

The alternative to this positions has emerged from within the left of the independent trade union movement and it concerns the general idea of working class leadership. This thinking has it, that in each struggle the working class should be pushed forward bit by bit into the forefront enabling it to take up its leadership role. This is a process that would neither be automatic and spontaneous and involves a host of tactical and strategic choices. This approach ends up by calling for a workers' programme which would establish its hegemony over the dispersed majority of South Africans. It could be argued that the impact of a workers programme would be minimised if its corollary is not there, that is the need for giving form to a political leadership capable of serving as the pivot of this process. What political leadership, then, would put into motion this workers' programme? Is it pos-

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sible to have a workers programme without a workers political organisation? These are complex and pertinent questions to which there are no easy answers. The dynamic of struggle in South Africa has brought these questions to the fore and it is only in the heat of struggle that guidelines to these questions will start to emerge.

Footnotes

1. "Errors of workerism", Isizwe - The Nation (UDF Journal) 1.3, November 1986
2. *ibid* pp 13-14
3. *ibid* pp 14-15
4. *ibid* p 15
5. *ibid*
6. R Lambert, "Political unionism", SALB 6.2/3, 1980
7. D Hemson, "Capital, trade unions and liberation" Capital and Class 2, 1977, p 33
8. "Errors of workerism", p 17
9. *ibid*
10. for an extensive analysis of this debate see: SALB 5.2, 1979; 7.1/2, 1982; and 8.1, 1982
11. "Errors of workerism", p 17
12. see WIP 40, especially the article on Fort Beaufort
13. "Errors of workerism", p 27
14. *ibid* p 18
15. *ibid* p 19
16. see P Bonner in SALB 8.4, February 1983
17. see SALB 7.8, 1982
18. "Errors of workerism", p 25
19. SALB 7.8
20. see D Pillay in WIP 37, 1985, pp 4-13; Labour Monitoring Group on the Eastern Cape stay-away and interview with T Mkalipi in SALB 11.1, September 1985
21. "Errors of workerism", p 25
22. *ibid* p 22
23. *ibid* p29

Towards a "living wage"

Workers demands over sixty years

Abner Jack*

A turning point in South African trade union history occurred in 1981. In that year, FOSATU issued its demand for a living wage of R2 per hour for all workers. This was the first time in the history of the South African labour movement that any major union organisation had dared to demand a living wage. In previous years, unions and federations had made demands for increases, notably SACTU's pound-a-day campaign of the 1950s. They represented substantial increases, but were never put forward as affording a decent standard of living.

No trade union, until 1981, was confident enough or bold enough to demand a living wage. The trade union movement in 1981, however, was very different compared to any previous era. It had, the year before, finally won legal recognition for African unions after a long battle, and in the following five years the membership of trade unions doubled. The workers' greater strength and confidence and experience of huge victories - made it possible to launch the living wage campaign of 1981 and placed it on the agenda for the whole movement, and it has now been taken up by COSATU.

What is a living wage?

The living wage is part of the history of the trade union and labour movement. The earliest reference to the living wage was made by a radical writer in 1874:

The first thing that those who manage trade societies should settle is a minimum which they should regard as a point below which they should never go ... Such a one as will secure sufficiency of food, and some degree of personal and home comfort to the worker; not a miserable allowance to starve on, but living wages.

(Lloyd Jones in The Beehive, quoted in S Webb, Industrial Democracy, 1987, p 587)

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The living wage became one of the policies advocated by the Independent Labour Party within its general programme of "Socialism in our Time", after the fall of the 1924 Labour Government in Britain. (1) The ILP was then an important socialist organisation affiliated to the Labour Party, and it advocated that the priority of a future Labour Government should be the achievement of a minimum living income for all and that other policies should centre around this aim. The policy had a number of forms but its central demand was for a national minimum wage sufficient to meet all needs, and for the wage to be supplemented by expanded social services including Family Allowances.

Wages constitute one of the major factors in the economic and social life of any industrial community. In order to live, that is to provide themselves with food, clothing, housing and all the other necessities of life, workers and their families depend almost entirely on wages. Obviously trade unions and their members should seek to achieve high wages in order that workers might be able to satisfy more of their basic needs. Arguably high wages can be considered as having important advantages for the economy as a whole, because they ensure a high level of demand for goods and services, and they also stimulate improvements in productivity.

For workers and their organisations, it is desirable that workers should be paid an adequate living wage which may be determined by their basic needs. The application of this principle is ideal for the practice of regulating wages. Although the idea is still vague, a living wage is usually considered as the amount sufficient to provide for the basic needs of a family of average size. (2) These basic needs are understood by some people (mainly employers) to mean enough for the mere subsistence necessary to maintain physical health in the short term. Others (the trade unions) think that a living wage should provide at least a few simple comforts in addition to a meagre subsistence.

Basic needs

According to the International Labour Organisation, basic needs as have two elements: they include certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing are included, as would be certain household equipment and furniture. Secondly, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities. (3)

Basic needs constitute the minimum objective of society, not the full range of desirable attributes, many of which will inevitably take longer to attain. The basic-needs concept is of universal applicability, although the relative importance of its components will vary with the level of development and from one nation to another. (4) The satisfaction of an absolute level of basic needs should be placed within a broader framework, namely, the fulfilment of basic human rights, thus embracing individual and group participation of the people in formulating and implementing the decisions which affect them.

It is important that wages should enable workers' families to enjoy some of the good things of life, over and above the generally agreed essentials, as mere subsistence wages are not enough. As needs change with the times, the living wage should also constantly be changing for the better, particularly in an environment of economic growth. It is difficult to estimate exactly what constitutes a living wage and various methods may be used, differing greatly from country to country and influenced by accustomed standards of living and consumption habits. Workers should not just know that they need more money in their wages. They should be able to say what they need the money for, what things they want to buy and cannot buy unless they have more money.

Just as the employers do not first work out how much money they need to remain healthy when they decide what dividends to pay themselves, workers also do not want only the minimum amount of money to stay alive. They want to be able to live full and comfortable lives.

It is important to note that workers find it difficult to live decently on their present wages, because they cannot afford adequate health, recreation and education needs for their children. In many cases they are faced with the difficult choice of paying for high transport costs and rents or food. Economists have worked out subsistence measures which include the amount of money which a family with an average number of children needs:

- (i) To buy the minimum amount of the proper food which they need to stay healthy.
- (ii) To buy enough clothes to keep them warm in the winter and cool in summer.
- (iii) To buy fuel for cooking and soap for cleaning.
- (iv) To pay rent for a proper home.
- (v) To pay the fares they need to travel to work or school. (5)

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The calculations of these subsistence measures are, however, not always accurate and they bear no relation to the idea of a living wage. Their aim is to set lower limits to survival - not to assess the costs of a full human life. Basic needs may also be interpreted subjectively as the satisfaction of consumers' wants as perceived by the consumers themselves, rather than by physiologists, doctors and other specialists. (6) It is only workers themselves who know and can determine their living standards, thus knowing what to spend their money on. Therefore workers should be given opportunities to earn incomes necessary to purchase the basic goods and services.

AFRICAN WAGE DEMANDS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The early years

As early as in 1854, dock workers in Cape Town struck for an improvement in their wages. (7) In the first few years after the discovery of gold, the mine workers fought against the bad working conditions in the mines. In 1907 black mine workers went on strike to demand higher wages. In 1913 they struck again to complain about their living conditions and low wages. (8) The struggle for higher wages by African workers started in earnest after the First World War, a period of general industrial unrest.

The cost of living had gone up and there was also a serious drought and crop failure, which caused many people to leave the overcrowded reserves to search for work in towns. As a result of these conditions, a chain of protests was set off as workers began to demand higher wages. In 1918 the African sanitary workers - "night soil boys" - in Johannesburg went on strike and demanded sixpence a day more on their wage. Also in that year thousands of miners all over the Witwatersrand refused to buy food from the mine stores until prices came down.

The South African Native National Congress (which later became the African National Congress) also led the protest by calling for a general strike for a shilling a day increase in wages. (9) In 1919 another attempted strike took place in Bloemfontein, when Africans demanded a minimum wage of four shillings and sixpence a day. Masabalala, an Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) leader in Port Elizabeth, organised Africans to demand a minimum living wage of ten shillings a day and membership of the ICU. (10)

In 1920 about 70,000 mine workers stopped work for 12 days demanding more pay. African protests subsequently merged into a combined demand for increased wages, objections to the colour bar, and an attack on the pass system. Giving his presidential address in May 1919, S.M. Makgatho of the SANNC (ANC) referred to the two-fold problem of the Africans as the need for a living wage and the "infernal pass". (11)

The first widespread effort to organise African workers came with the rise of the ICU during the 1920s. The ICU promised to win higher wages and better working conditions for the African people. In its Economic and Political Programme for 1928, the ICU called for a minimum wage of five pounds per month (plus food and housing in country districts). (12) The ICU leadership also relied on negotiations through the Wage Board established under the 1925 Wage Act to investigate and implement minimum wages in particular cases. After the collapse of the ICU in the late 1920s, Clements Kadalie set up the Independent ICU in East London. In September 1929 he organised a strike demanding an increase from three shillings and sixpence to six shillings and sixpence in daily wages for rail and dock workers. (13)

It is hard, today, to understand what these demands meant. We no longer use pounds and shillings and even a rand, though it has the same name, has a different buying power today compared with just one year ago. At the end of this article we give a table which converts the wage demands we mention into today's money. It is useful to look at this table and at the graph that goes with it to get a better understanding of the value of workers' wage claims.

The war period

The labour struggles which followed the collapse of the ICU involved mainly the organisation of African industrial unions. During the Second World War, African unions increased and became strong. In 1941 the Council for Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) was formed. Its major objective was the full statutory recognition of African unions and in 1942 it campaigned for a weekly minimum wage of forty shillings. African unions also successfully approached the Wage Board for wage determinations especially in the chemical industry, the laundry, the baking and confectionary trades. For example, in 1936 the Wage Board recommended four pounds and ten shillings weekly for bakers and two pounds for bakers' assistants. In 1938 six pounds per month was recommended

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for labourers in the commercial and distributive trade. (14)

In 1941 the Natal Sugar Industry Employees Union (NSIEU) initiated a successful struggle for a wage improvement for mill workers in Natal. This resulted in a 10 shillings per month increase in that year, followed by a Wage Board determination in 1942 which with a cost of living adjustment brought the total weekly wage to 35 shillings. (15) In mid-1941 there was a Wage Board investigation into Unskilled Labour for the Witwatersrand and Pretoria, covering 47,000 workers in 34 industries. This resulted in Wage Determination 105 which fixed a minimum wage of 25 shillings per week, rising to 27 shillings over two years. However, this wage fell below 37 shillings and sixpence per week, which the Smit Report at the end of 1942 calculated as the poverty datum line for an average urban African family. (16)

In December 1942, after a threat of strike action by workers in the iron and steel industry, employers offered an extra 3 shillings per week for labourers and 3 shillings and nine pence for semi-skilled on the existing wages of 21 shillings and 24 shillings. At a general meeting in January 1943 workers protested that they were starving and demanded immediate action to win 40 shillings per week. (17) Similar demands were also made by meat, dairy, mineral water and some municipal workers, but none of these were granted. In 1942 the Wage Board policy provoked a number of strikes in and around Johannesburg.

Among the causes of the strike wave were the low minimum wage fixed by Wage Determination 105, and the fact that workers in certain industries (mining, timber, clay and water) were bitterly dissatisfied with their exclusion from Wage Determination 105. (18) After the 1942 strikes, black union officials received an increased degree of informal recognition from employers in commerce and industry anxious to prevent unrest among their workers. (19) In 1943 a cost of living allowance was granted to all African workers except those in mining and agriculture.

The African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU) which was formed in 1941 mobilised workers in the mining industry around basic economic demands. The African Mine Clerks' Association, angered by the Chamber of Mines' refusal to pay them the statutory Cost of Living Allowance, joined AMWU. As a result of AMWU's demand for reforms which followed the spontaneous strikes in 1942, the government appointed the Witwatersrand Mine Natives' Wage Commission (the

Lansdowne Commission) to investigate wages and working conditions of African mine workers. In December 1943 the Commission recommended:

- (a) Wages and other benefits equalling an annual increase of 10 pounds and 4 shillings for surface workers, and 11 pounds 14 shillings and 7 pence for underground workers. (20)
- (b) Cost of Living and other allowances; paid leave and overtime

The state and the mining employers rejected these recommendations and only agreed to a lesser wage increase and overtime. In 1944 the AMWU conference, attended by delegates from every mine, rank-and-file workers and many CNETU trade unionists, discussed the Lansdowne Commission Report. AMWU termed the recommendations "hopelessly inadequate and unsatisfactory", demanded a Wage Board inquiry and called on the labour movement to protest against victimisation of their members. Food shortages in South Africa in 1945 made matters worse as compound rations were reduced, resulting in food protests in the mines. In March 1946, in one such protest at the Modderfontein East mine, police shot dead one worker and injured forty others. (21)

At the AMWU's conference in April 1946 workers threatened to strike and demanded the following:

- * a minimum wage of 10 shillings a day
- * family housing
- * two weeks paid annual leave
- * 100 pounds gratuity after 15 years' service
- * payment of repatriation fares
- * repeal of War Measure 1425

Implicit in these was the demand for the creation of a permanent, stable workforce in the mines and the abandonment of the migrant labour system. The demands were ignored and one-day protests occurred, leading up to the historic strike in August 1946 by an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 African mine workers. (22) After five days the strike was crushed by heavy police repression. AMWU was destroyed in the mines and numerous officials jailed. It was not until 1949 that another smaller increase of 3 pence per shift was granted, still leaving wages lower than those recommended by the Lansdowne Commission.

SACTU and the pound-a-day campaign

The Defiance Campaign of the early 1950s generated a high degree

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of confidence among the people, resulting in the call for a Congress of the People to work out a Freedom Charter. Workers became involved not only in disputes with employers and the state, but became a strong part of the mass resistance to apartheid. In June 1955, the Freedom Charter was adopted by the Congress Alliance. One of the clauses of the Freedom Charter concerns work and security - calling for a national minimum wage and a 40-hour working week. Earlier, in March 1955, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) - a non-racial trade union co-ordinating body - was formed.

SACTU's basic principle was to serve effectively the interests of the workers, both the immediate interests of higher wages and better conditions of life and work as well as the ultimate objective of complete freedom. SACTU believed that the organising of the mass of workers for higher wages, better conditions of life and labour is inextricably linked up with a struggle for political rights and liberation from all oppressive laws and practices.

The poverty wages paid to African workers in the 1950s prompted SACTU to launch the famous pound-a-day campaign, following the Alexandra Bus Boycott of 1957. This was an intensive campaign which was carried out on every possible level.

According to SACTU, the living standards of the South African working population, especially of the African, Coloured and the Indian people, had for many years been far too low to afford the amenities of nutrition, housing, health, culture and recreation which could and should be provided by a country of comparable economic development. (23) In order to help solve this problem, SACTU sent a memorandum to the South African Federated Chamber of Industries (an employers' organisation) in September 1957 with the following proposals:

1. A proposal for an immediate and substantial increase in wages of all categories of workers.
2. A proposal for the immediate payment of a minimum wage of not less than one pound a day for the so-called "unskilled workers".
3. A proposal that all employers recognise and conduct direct negotiations with (African) trade unions. (24)

The campaign gained instant popularity with African workers and the black population generally. Many employers were forced to respond with wage increases.

SACTU leaders consciously linked the struggle for political rights and power to the day-to-day struggle for higher wages and improved working conditions. The campaign also converged with SACTU's plan for organising the unorganised workers. SACTU embarked on educational work and local committees began to print their own leaflets, holding mass rallies to mobilise workers around the pound-a-day demand. There was a strong realisation in SACTU that workers needed to be organised into trade unions or even some lesser form of organisation (such as factory committees) in order to win their demands on the wage front. (25)

In 1959, the campaign was strengthened by the militancy of the masses and a much closer relationship was forged between SACTU and the ANC. Out of the SACTU Conference came a renewed emphasis on forming new unions in the basic industries. The pound-a-day campaign was to be conducted in the following manner:

- (a) by building powerful unions in the transport and metal industries;
- (b) by creating workers' factory committees as a step towards the formation of trade unions; and
- (c) by demanding a minimum wage of a pound-a-day for all workers.

Although SACTU's victories on the wage front were significant, the workers' wages were still below the subsistence level as the Poverty Datum Line had increased to approximately 27 pounds per month. The pound-a-day slogan remained relevant and the organising of workers into the trade union movement was necessary to strengthen the collective struggle against poverty wages. In fact, through their consistent campaign, they popularised the need for increased wages and they scored notable victories in the metal and distributive, textile and other industries. For example, in 1960 metal workers won an increase of sixpence per hour on the basic wage, bringing it up to 3 pounds 10 shillings and 9 pence per week. (26)

The emergence of independent black trade unions

By the early 1970s, African workers in particular were hard hit by increasing prices of essential items such as food, clothing and transport. As a direct result of the higher cost of living, workers launched a massive resistance campaign. This reached a peak in 1973 when an estimated 100,000 workers participated in a

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series of short but widespread industrial strikes, centred mainly in Natal.

The wave of strikes began on January 9 at Coronation Brick and Tile Company outside Durban. The workers here went on strike demanding an increase in the minimum wage from R8.97 to R20 per week. (27) The strikes spread all over Natal and workers usually demanded wage increases of R20 to R30 per week. Although the workers won relatively small wage increases, they had nevertheless showed their potential power to the employers and the state. Throughout the 1970s, workers resorted to various forms of struggle in order to win basic demands, for example, the right to organise freely and to improve collectively their standard of living. In 1973 the National Union of South African Students' Wages Commissions campaigned for R30 per week for all workers. (28) The 1973 strikes engendered a new confidence amongst workers which led to the formation of new independent trade unions for black workers. As a consequence of this, by the end of August 1975 there existed a total of 25 African trade unions with a combined membership of approximately 66,000. (29)

In May 1977 SACTU submitted a memorandum to all employers' organisations in South Africa, calling on them to respond to the fundamental grievances and immediate demands of the black working class. Among the minimum and essential demands SACTU outlined on behalf of South African workers, there was a demand of a national minimum wage of R50 per week for all workers, indexed to inflation. This wage demand was increased to R75 in 1980. (30) In late 1979 and mid-1980, textile workers from the Frame Group of companies came out on strike demanding an immediate 25% increase in wages. This was the same group which had been the focus of African workers' grievances during the 1973 strikes. According to the Chamber of Industries' (Durban) survey on wage structures, the average weekly basic minimum wage for a black unskilled male was R37.83 in 1980. (31)

In 1979 the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU) was asked by its members at Fatti's and Moni's to negotiate an increase in wages. Workers wanted a minimum wage of R40 a week. At that time male workers were earning an average of R32 per week and females between R19 and R27 per week. (32) The historic strike that occurred after the managements' rejection of these demands was highlighted by the strong community support of the striking workers, creating strong links between trade unions and community organisa-

tion especially in the Western Cape.

The living wage campaign

At its annual conference in 1980, the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) called for a national minimum wage of R50 a week indexed to inflation for all workers in commerce and industry. It also called for a minimum monthly salary of R80 for all domestic workers. (33) The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) launched the first systematic campaign for a living wage in 1980. This began with a massive strike by Eastern Cape motor workers in Uitenhage in June and July 1980, who demanded R2 an hour, a 74% increase on the existing minimum wage of R1.15. At the end of the dispute the striking workers accepted R1.48 an hour after an agreement between FOSATU and the employers. Together they agreed to sponsor a survey which would attempt to establish a living wage in the area. (34)

Black wages had been, and are still, compared to Poverty Datum Lines (PDL) which attempt to calculate the minimum needs for a black family to survive. The workers and their unions argued that the PDL was a "yardstick against which to measure poverty, not a goal in setting wage levels". The workers stressed that the PDLs are calculated on the minimum quantity of basic items which a family needs to "live from hand to mouth, rather than enjoy a reasonable quality of life". According to FOSATU, a reasonable wage:

- * must cover workers' actual needs, not the minimum required to keep him alive;
- * must provide for a reasonable standard of living and not a continual struggle with poverty;
- * must provide a secure income which means that a worker must also have job security; there should be training; service allowance; redundancy pay; and benefits such as pension and medical schemes;
- * must be more equitable compared to company profits.

According to FOSATU's pamphlet, "Policy on a living wage", (1981) low wages in South Africa were a result of the powerlessness of the poor (workers) to bargain for better in the past. They also believed that management has attempted to justify the system of wage exploitation by the use of so-called scientific surveys of an adequate wage to support the needs of black workers and their families. FOSATU rejected this form of wage measurement and

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adopted instead the concept of a living wage. In rejecting the concept of PDL, FOSATU saw it as unacceptable that non-workers should have the presumption to decide what the requirements of workers should be.

FOSATU demanded that employers should start paying workers a living wage which they saw as a combination of two factors:

1. what workers themselves decide they require to live;
2. what workers are able to get from their managements at both national and plant based negotiations based on the company's ability to pay, its profits and the ability of the union to get higher wages in the company.

They argued that a living wage could only be achieved through the acceptance by the employers and the state of the right to negotiate wages at both plant and national level. Other demands contained in the policy document were the following:

- * Unions should also have access to company profit figures and the legal rules of disclosure should apply to any wage negotiations.
- * Wages should be automatically linked to a consumer price index (CPI).
- * Any wage negotiations should take place over and above this increase, ie. should be about real rises in wages and living standards.
- * remuneration and benefits should be linked to long service with the company.
- * The shop stewards involved in negotiations should be given paid study leave to enable them to become familiar with methods of negotiation and company accounting procedures.
- * An acceptable minimum wage level is R2 per hour.

In the following years FOSATU led the battle for a decent living wage. Towards the end of 1985 most major trade unions said that the minimum wage should be at least R3,50 per hour. They began to see that the only way for workers to win a decent minimum wage was to unite and embark on a national campaign for a living wage. The formation of a new super-federation of unions in November was seen as making that possible.

When this new federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, was formed in November 1985, its resolution on a national

minimum living wage was:

- * That the Central Executive Committee establish as soon as possible what workers regard as a minimum living wage.
- * To initiate and conduct, in alliance with other progressive organisations and trade unions in the country, an ongoing national campaign for a legally enforced national minimum living wage for all workers in South Africa, through worker action and negotiation in every industry.
- * To fight for this minimum living wage to be automatically linked to the rate of inflation.
- * To have access to company accounts so that workers can see exactly how the wealth they have produced is being wasted and misused by the employers' profit system.

In 1986 COSATU affiliates in every major industry demanded a living wage of R3,50 an hour and a 40-hour working week. COSATU claims that workers cannot survive on starvation wages and that they must share the wealth they produce. MAWU began to mobilise a national living wage campaign in tandem with its negotiations in the iron and steel industry, where it demanded R3.50 per hour. The campaign was planned carefully and MAWU distributed posters, pamphlets and stickers nationally mobilising workers for the living wage. The purpose of the campaign has been to: (35)

- * build strong national solidarity among MAWU members so the union can mobilise quickly around national issues
- * combine the campaign with an organising drive to organise the unorganised metal workers
- * put ongoing pressure on the metal bosses

MAWU has submitted demands of a minimum of R4 an hour for the 1987 negotiations to the National Industrial Council for the Steel, Engineering and Metal Industries. It has joined forces with the National Union of Mineworkers in the living wage battle, beginning what seems to be COSATU's most important campaign this year. (36)

NUM has called for an urgent review of wage policies on the mines and so make miners the highest paid workers in the economy, thus implying a demand for a greater share of the massive profits made by the mines every year. This emphasis by trade unions on demanding "a share of the company profits" was highlighted during the Pick 'n' Pay strike led by the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA) in 1986. By demanding a share of the

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profits, unions mean that they want a bigger share of the total revenue to go to the living wage. This means that workers require full financial disclosure on how resources are utilised and on the salaries and fringe benefits of white collar and managerial positions. (37)

CONCLUSION

Black workers in South Africa have long been involved in struggle and organisation to improve their standard of living and to achieve basic trade union rights. In the past sixty years these workers struggled successfully for significant wage demands which have enhanced the growth and success of the trade union movement. The table below lists a number of wage demands and wage victories through the last sixty years of South African labour history. In showing what their real values would be in mid-1987, this table uses a price index that the Labour Research Service constructed from three historical price index series, with estimates being made of inflation to mid-1987.

The accompanying graph illustrates the significant wage demands that have been made by major unions in the last sixty years. It shows clearly the progressive development of workers' wage demands over this period, expressed in 1987 rands. These range from the ICU's demand of a minimum weekly wage of R47,10 (in real terms) in 1928, to COSATU's demand of R219,36 in 1985. As pointed out earlier in this article, it was only in 1981 that a demand for a living wage was made by FOSATU, leading directly to the current COSATU campaign of 1987.

COSATU resolved in its inaugural meeting that the Central Executive Committee should establish as soon as possible what workers regard as a minimum living wage. Although COSATU have not yet set a specific demand, in the special campaign edition of the Cosatu News (March 1987) they call on workers to use their questionnaire designed on worker-based and worker controlled wage index systems, to fix the wage needed by workers. Cosatu News will then publish the average of the submissions received from workers.

Just like the SACTU's pound-a-day campaign 20 years ago, the living wage campaign this year will popularise the need for increased wages and will also help to organise and unite workers into powerful industrial unions, thereby boosting COSATU's member-

ship and support in the coming months.

The living wage campaign highlights the importance to unions of having a national, unified wage demand, the advantages of which would be:

- * a powerful organising tool
- * a clear, unifying goal for all COSATU negotiators and shop stewards
- * a formidable influence on employer perceptions (who by contrast do not have a single position on wages)
- * a popular and effective theme for all union propaganda.

For example, the unions may take up the R4 per hour proposed by MAWU and the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) in the iron and steel negotiations as a step towards a living wage. This will gain an immense backing from the workers notwithstanding the "technical difficulties" which may arise in adjusting this demand for different industries.

A COSATU demand for R4 per hour as a step towards a living wage will become a widely popular theme in all workers' struggles. This is because it is an expression of workers' own feeling, and because of the immense authority which COSATU has amongst the workers.

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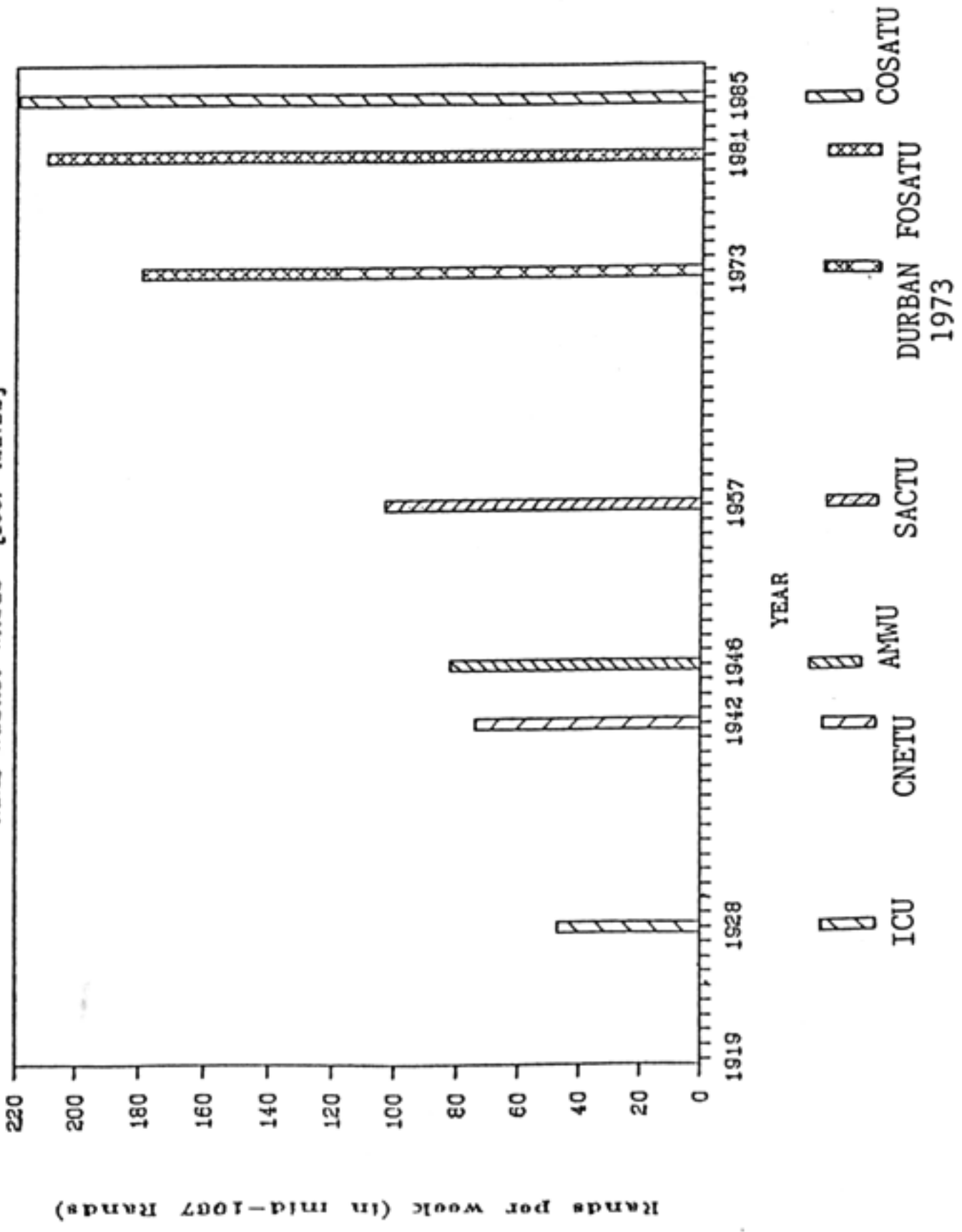
TOWARDS A "LIVING WAGE": WORKERS WAGE DEMANDS OVER 60 YEARS

YEAR	CPI 1987=100	HISTORICAL WAGE DEMAND (Rand per week)	REAL VALUE MID 1987 (Rand per week)	RAND PER HOUR 45	Details of wage demand
1919	5,4	2,25	41,67	0,93	African workers in Bloemfontein demand 4/6 per day
1919	5,4	5,00	92,59	2,06	10/- per week demanded by ICU in Port Elizabeth
1928	4,9	2,31	47,10	1,05	* ICU demand £5 per month minimum for all workers - 1928 Congress
1929	4,9	3,25	66,33	1,47	6/6 per day for dock and railway workers - Independent ICU, East London
1936	4,3	4,00	93,02	2,07	Wage Board recommendation for bakers assistants
1938	4,5	2,77	61,54	1,37	£6 per month minimum for shop workers (Wage Board)
1941	4,9	3,50	71,43	1,59	35/- per week for sugar mill workers (Wage Determination)
1942	5,4	4,00	74,07	1,65	* CNETU demand £2 a week for all workers
1946	6,1	5,00	81,97	1,82	* African Mineworkers' Union: 10/- a day for miners
1957	9,7	10,00	103,09	2,29	* SACTU £1-a-day campaign
1962	10,6	10,00	94,34	2,10	SACTU metal workers demand 25c/ph and a 40 hour week
1973	16,7	20,00	119,76	2,66	Durban 1973: Coronation Brick demand R20 per week
1973	16,7	30,00	179,64	2,66	* 1973 Strikes: Workers demand between R20 and R30 per week
1974	18,6	30,00	161,29	3,58	NUSAS Wages Commission Campaign "Workers need R30 a week"
1977	26,1	50,00	191,57	4,26	SACTU demand R50 per week minimum for all workers
1978	28,9	40,00	138,41	3,08	Food and Canning Workers Union demand R40 per week minimum
1980	37,3	75,00	201,07	4,47	SACTU demand R75 per week minimum for all workers
1980	37,3	18,46	49,50	1,10	SAAMU demand R80 per month minimum for domestic workers
1980	37,3	50,00	134,05	2,98	SAAMU call for a national minimum wage of R50 per week
1980	37,3	40,00	107,24	2,38	Fattis and Monis strike over R40 per week demand
1981	42,9	90,00	209,79	4,66	* FOSATU Living Wage demand: R2 per hour for all workers
1985	71,8	46,16	64,29	1,43	DWA demand R200 per month for domestic workers
1985	71,8	157,50	219,36	4,87	* COSATU demand R3.50 per hour for all workers
1987	100,0	180,00	180,00	4,00	MANU/IMF demand for metal workers in 1987 - R4 per hour minimum

* These significant wage demands are illustrated on the graph

WORKERS WAGE DEMANDS OVER 60 YEARS

REAL WEEKLY WAGES [1987 RANDS]



Industrial decentralisation and exploitation

The case of Botshabelo

William Cobbett

Following the emergence of a new and improved working relationship between the state and big business after the Carlton and Good Hope conferences, the state unveiled its Regional Development Plan in 1982. This was essentially to be an attempt to revitalise the decentralisation programme, so that industry would be able to move closer to large pools of resettled labour.

The state offered wide-ranging concessions that were claimed, with some justification, to be the most attractive in the world. Glossy advertisements showed ideal factory conditions, contented labourers working in good surroundings and the underlying message portrayed was that everyone involved would mutually benefit from investment in such points.

A survey that I conducted in the industrial development area of Botshabelo in March has revealed nothing of the sort - what it did reveal, however, was new levels in the exploitation of workers that leave the observer lost for words. The purpose of this article is to reveal these conditions so that South Africans, and the state's detractors and apologists overseas, will know some of the real effects of the unabated continuation of apartheid.

Botshabelo

Botshabelo township, previously known as "Onverwacht", has only been in existence for some eight years, in which time it has grown to become South Africa's second largest township. It has been settled overwhelmingly by people who have been forcibly removed or harassed out of other areas, and also by tens of thousands of ex-farm workers. It has a current population in the region of 420,000 - 500,000 people, separated by 55kms of apartheid space from Bloemfontein.

In 1982 Botshabelo was designated a growth point in terms of the state's regional development policy. The concessions offered reflected both the size of Botshabelo and its high levels of

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unemployment, with the result that the labour incentives are at the highest level in South Africa.

Politically, Botshabelo is run by the Department of Development Aid, as it is still Trust Land. The industrial area is administered by the South African Development Trust Corporation (STK) who, in conjunction with the Board for the Decentralisation of Industries, attempt to attract potential investors to Botshabelo.

The state is, at the moment, contemplating ways of incorporating the area into the QwaQwa bantustan in the face of overwhelming rejection of the plan in Botshabelo itself. This rejection was clearly demonstrated in a recent survey conducted by members of the University of the Orange Free State. A tarred road which will surround the township is currently under speedy construction, which is a clear indication of the state preparing itself for a confrontation.

As a growth point, Botshabelo has enjoyed a modest degree of success, compared to other such points in South Africa. There are currently about 50 factories established there, employing just over 5,000 workers. The state has been successful in attracting a significant proportion of foreign investors into the area - the majority of foreign factories are Taiwanese controlled and the Israelis have recently begun to move in too.

However, this creation of 5,000 "jobs" in about five years must be set against the fact that this number is substantially exceeded every year by the number of new entrants onto the local labour market. Young men unable to afford the bus fare often walk the 55km to Bloemfontein with the vague hope of finding some employment - the industries at Botshabelo offer pathetically few job opportunities at exceedingly low wages.

The bulk of the material referred to below comes from a random sample of 25% of the factories listed by STK. From a variety of often surprising sources the reality behind Botshabelo began to emerge - this involved, in financial terms, large-scale deception and defrauding of the state and its agencies and, in human terms, the super-exploitation and dehumanising of the workforce.

The first is possible because of the inefficiency of the state's agencies coupled with totally unscrupulous businessmen, the second

is possible because of the compliance of the state coupled with totally unscrupulous businessmen. The only common pattern that seemed to emerge is that the businessmen always win, and the workers always lose - again and again.

There are many small incidents and facts to relate, but a clear pattern emerges which allows us to characterise Botshabelo and places like it. They are state-subsidised sites for the exploitation of workers, devoid of any meaningful protection for the workers such as Industrial Councils, health and safety legislation, control of wages, regulation of overtime etc. And increasingly, as emerged at Botshabelo, they are fitting into the international movement of capital and the division of labour, as foreign capital seeks new springboards into international markets, sometimes avoiding the quota restrictions placed on their country of origin. And finally, and most significantly, places such as Botshabelo are a vital part of the state's attempts to beat sanctions.

The first area to be closely examined will be the various methods by which the businessmen con the state - for the state's part, only two explanation's are possible if we are to understand the continuation of such practices: (a) complete incompetence; or (b) acceptance of corrupt business practices. Of course, both are equally possible, and both were alleged by businessmen I spoke to.

BUSINESSMEN AND THE STATE

Most of the details discussed below come from unattributable sources in Botshabelo, but were confirmed by many businessmen referring to such practices. Some business people themselves said that they had seen corruption before in their lives, but never in such a blatant way or on such a scale. Below are outlined a few of the many methods by which money is siphoned off.

Loading the quotes

A company relocating to a decentralisation point generally expects the same standard of factory as the one that they are vacating. As such, the basic shell that they will move into in a place such as Botshabelo may require some refitting. This is open to extensive fraud.

Taking a hypothetical example, let us assume that a factory

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requires electrical re-wiring that a genuine quote would value at R20,000. The state requires three quotes to be submitted, and the cheapest is normally awarded the contract. What has been happening at Botshabelo is that an informal agreement is concluded between the businessman and the electrical contractor.

The electrical contractor over-prices the work at (say) R28,000, and then arranges for two contacts in the electrical trade to submit quotes slightly above his figure. (This "favour" to be reciprocated at a later date). The "cheapest" quote is then accepted by the state, and the R8,000 surplus is divided between the businessman and the electrician. The state agencies are failing to assess the accuracy of the quotes themselves, although there apparently are signs that they are belatedly waking up.

Cheap loans

The state will subsidise loans for items such as capital equipment which will allow the industrialists to assume production at the decentralisation point. Firstly, it is alleged, the state does insufficient homework to check on the viability of the company, and its assets' ability to guarantee the loan. So the loan - sometimes these are very large indeed - may be granted on a shaky financial basis, and involves the state in potential future losses.

In one specific instance, a clothing manufacturer recently moved to Botshabelo and obtained a loan for (say) R400,000 worth of sewing machines and other productive equipment. They installed, however, second-hand equipment worth (say) R150,000, thus leaving R250,000 of cheap capital to be passed back to the holding company. Again, the state did not have an independent valuation of the machinery and were thus taken for a ride. What makes these loans doubly attractive is the ease with which they are obtained in many instances, it is alleged, the same application made to a competitive bank would certainly be rejected.

Cheating on wages

This is alleged to be a widespread practice. In terms of the decentralisation incentives, this is invariably the most attractive to the businessmen, as they themselves confirm. The state pays cash, tax-free to the industrialists, 95% of the wages of the staff, up to a maximum of R100 per employee per month for seven years.

In spite of state attempts to curb the widely-reported abuses of the system, the industrialists are still able to illegally cream off substantial amounts of cash. There are a variety of ways of doing this, all producing handsome reward.

Because of the size of some of the workforces, seasonal labour adjustments and absenteeism, it is hard to know how many people should be in the factory at any one time. Or, more crucially, to know whether the number of workers in the factory tallies with the number that the industrialist claims are working there. In this way, industrialists often claim to have more workers than they are in fact employing and thus will get cash for non-existent workers.

Alternatively, there is also sometimes a discrepancy between the amount claimed, and the amount actually paid to the workers. These are very popular methods of defrauding the state, because the money is paid in cash. Again, this is often siphoned off to an ailing holding company. What makes it even easier for the industrialists to engage in such practices is the fact that their claims are not approved locally, but in Pretoria.

These are some of the most blatant and profitable ways of creaming-off profits out of the system. There are many other alleged frauds, including deducting UIF from the workers but not paying all of it to the state.

What seems clear about the behaviour - certainly of South African companies that decentralise - is that the policy is being seen as presenting a golden opportunity for weak and near defunct companies to save themselves. By creating a unit to decentralise to in places such as Botshabelo, the holding company can absorb the profits made, both legally and illegally, and attempt to put itself on a firmer footing.

This also includes paying an undervalued cost-price for goods produced by the subsidiary, allowing the holding company to use the in-built profit margin to its own ends. The real value of the holding company/subsidiary relationship is that, if any of the fraud comes to light, the holding company can claim complete innocence and blame it on the corrupt practices of staff employed in the subsidiary. They seem to believe, with some justification, that they cannot lose but have much to gain.

Large questions are obviously raised here about the effectiveness

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and, indeed, the aims of the entire industrial decentralisation policy, and also about the competence of the state agencies responsible for the administration of the system. There would seem to be a number of reasons accounting for the state's inability or unwillingness to act.

Firstly, the state attaches a high priority to attracting business to areas such as Botshabelo, especially foreign investment. In their keenness to counteract the growing momentum of sanctions and disinvestment, the officials are walking around with their cheque-books open.

Secondly, it is alleged that much of the problem emanates from the fact that, because the programme has such a political importance, the state makes political appointments rather than seeking the most efficient people to administer the programme. To the extent that it is aware of the above alleged malpractices, the state prefers to hide the facts under the carpet and avoid the repercussions - the industrialists being very much aware of this point.

The decisions made, for both the above reasons, are often more political than they are economic. This can be also directly linked to the inbuilt corruption of the bantustan policy and the continuation of apartheid.

WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

While it is impossible to feel any empathy for the way in which the state is having rings run around it by the businessmen, it is very different when one looks at the effects of this policy on the workers. For here the state and the industrialists - local and foreign - are together involved in the most horrendous and inhuman exploitation of the local inhabitants.

While the above information was received in an "off-the-record" manner, the conditions of the workers and wages comes directly out of the questionnaires that were administered in Botshabelo.

The labour force

One of the most striking features about the labour employed at Botshabelo is the gender composition of the labour force. The companies surveyed employed a total of 2,127 African workers, 1,976 of whom were women. There are a number of reasons for this

phenomenon - one is the fact that women are "traditionally" lower paid, while another is the belief that women are intrinsically better adapted to certain kinds of labour. Both will be examined.

The wages at Botshabelo, in almost all cases, amount to a starvation level. How else can one describe R2 a day, R10 a week or R43 per month (however you want to put it), which was the lowest wage that was encountered? (A hamburger at the cafe not 100 yards away from the industrial area costs over R2.) The "higher" wages are little different. Company by company, the following are the starting wages for women workers per month - R60; R56; R60; R76; R64; R60; R120; R68; R77; R64 and R50.

Some companies claim that they only pay "low" wages while they are training the staff. However, the wages attained when "trained" are not very different. To take the example of one Taiwanese clothing manufacturer, the "training" wage is R16 - R17 per week, while the wage of those "trained" ranges between R18 - R22 per week "if their quality is acceptable".

Another example - while "training" the women (for 4-8 weeks), another company pays R15 per week. Once "trained" the women then have their wages increased to R17 per week.

Taking examples such as these, it is important to remember one of the points made at the beginning - the state pays 95% of the wages. The real cost to the employer, therefore, of a woman earning R60 per month, would amount to R3 per month.

One aspect which originally confuses the naive observer is this - given the fact that the employers only pay 5% of most of the wages, why don't they pay the workers at least the full allowance provided by the state? After all, you would argue, it would hardly harm them. The reason given to me by one source was damningly simple - if you actually paid the workers the full state allowance, there would be no margin left to make illegal claims.

African men at Botshabelo are generally employed as security guards, drivers, manual labourers, gardeners etc. Their wages, while not as low as their female counterparts, are still insufficient to live on. The higher end of the wage scales are usually held by men involved in the production process and possessing some degree of skill, while the lowest wages are paid to generally unskilled labour. The main concern, however, remains the wages

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paid to the women (a) because their wages are so very low and (b) because they constitute the overwhelming majority of the workforce.

Working conditions

The industrial section of Botshabelo is separated from the rest of the township, and is close to the main road to Bloemfontein. In fact the factories and the elite black housing section are the only parts of Botshabelo clearly visible to the passing motorist. (who is possibly en route to the Thab'Nchu Sun casino, less than three miles in a direct line from Botshabelo.)

The factories are all of a standard design, and all are behind high security fencing and gates, one of them having armed guards. Their average size is 1,250 square metres, with offices for the owners and managers directly adjacent to the production area.

However, the first feature one notices is not so much what is inside the factories, but rather the groups of men and women who sit outside them all day in the hope that some vacancy may arise, or some short term casual work become available.

Another feature strikes you at around lunch time, when the workers have to sit outside the factory (yet often within the gates), looking for a spot of shade in which to have their break. I saw no canteen or rest-benches in the majority of the factories I visited - the only shade generally provided was for the businessmen's cars.

In the clothing factories, as in many others, the production process is split into many different constituent parts, with one garment passing through as many as 14 hands. The main result of such a production process is the excruciating boredom which affects the workers, and their complete alienation from any involvement or interest in the work process. For some, their permanent job may be 8 1/2 hours daily, five days a week, of sewing a one inch line on hundreds of shirt pockets.

This type of work process occurs in cheap labour areas all over the world - the workers of Botshabelo, however, have other problems to contend with at the factory. For example, one practice used is to dock from the pay of any worker who spends "too long" at the toilet. This happens at a number of factories.

In another factory, in which I was shown around by the production manager, the most telling scene presented itself. There were rows and rows of women bent over busy sewing machines - some 248 in all - and there was a very large fan operating in the factory. The fan, however, pointed at the manager's desk only - the desk itself being elevated so that he could survey all his employees from behind as they worked facing the other direction. (Wages in this factory - R17 per week).

The number of hours worked by a worker are often overlooked when one is comparing and evaluating rates of pay. But with a generally longer working week and little or no statutory protection regarding overtime, the wages paid at Botshabelo become even lower.

Workers often work a basic 50 hour week with no overtime paid. In fact one manager alleged that in a certain company workers have money deducted from their basic pay if they refuse to work overtime. One company manufacturing metal products operated a shift system which allowed for production 22 hours a day - this meant that female workers finishing at 5 am have to walk home unprotected in the dark. (The wages paid to unskilled women workers in this firm are 30 cents an hour).

Most of the companies interviewed offered little in the way of standard conditions of employment such as pension, paid holidays, sick pay etc. To take the example of one clothing manufacturer that recently moved to Botshabelo - partly to escape unionised labour in Natal - and offered its workers no pension, no sick pay, no maternity benefit and no paid holidays. They did pay their women workers, however, between R17 and R20 per week.

One could go on relating abuse after abuse that is heaped onto these workers - the final reality of Botshabelo is captured very simply but sickeningly: as one manager explained to me, about once every week to 10 days, one of the women on the production line faints or collapses from hunger while working.

The workers try to hide the fact and claim that they are "ill" so that they will not lose their jobs - the solution to such hunger used by one company is to administer gripe water to help the workers ease their stomachs.

The hunger of the workforce is also noticeable by drops in production after the lunch break - lunch more often than not consisting

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of either plain brown bread or potatoes. By the afternoon, concentration and productivity drops both because of the nature of the work and the fact that the workers are hungry.

There is only one shop in the industrial area which, it is alleged, also manages to buy the damaged bread from the bakery. The workers claim that it charges up to 40c for half a loaf of brown bread, and 50c for half a loaf of white. I was not able to confirm the exact identity of the owners, but it is asserted that members of the QwaQwa cabinet have a stake in the operation.

Women workers

As already noted, the production lines are operated almost exclusively by women. At one level, the manufacturers are making use of the socially constructed gender division of labour, which has generally made women's wages much lower than their male counterparts. As one manager put it, "To remain competitive we must employ female labour".

However, managers were also quick to mouth many of the conventionally-held wisdoms as to the suitability of women to certain kinds of labour. Below are a few examples:

- * "This is mainly women's work - men do not have the patience. Women learn sewing while they are in the home."
- * "Women are more reliable than men, they are more serious, they work harder and they don't drink. They are also more dexterous than males."
- * "Sewing is difficult for men. It is easier for women to sew clothes."
- * "Women are more efficient, more clever than males. The physical work, such as digging trenches, is reserved for males."
- * "This society (African) is a women's society - the women work, the men only make children. The men are very lazy".

The last comment was from an Israeli manager of a Taiwanese company - he was obviously employed because of his expertise in what he referred to as "black culture". He also managed to claim that an attempted shift system at the factory had failed because "...

by 8pm they are asleep. It is in their culture - they are not dynamic people".

Women also have to put up with more personal indignity than the males. Workers allege that, at one Taiwanese firm, the whole workforce of over 200 women have to file through the gate onto the street past two males who feel around their breasts and between their legs in a search for stolen goods.

When managers were questioned as to whether they had any specific problems related to the employment of female labour, many referred to the "problem" of maternity. This was one manager's answer, "It's the normal crap. They have babies. So we organise a birth control clinic to come here once or twice a month, and the women are given injections or pills, while condoms are given to men. All of this is free."

This company offered no pension, no sick pay, but was prepared, however, to arrange for the "benefit" of a free service which is erroneously referred to as "family planning". As far as could be ascertained, most companies at Botshabelo made the same provision.

A common feature that has to be endured by all the African workers, however, is the pervasive racism that emerges from the owners and managers. This racism takes the form of either the most simplistic kind of race classification and generalisations, or else is characterised by an extremely paternalistic attitude.

It is small wonder that the workers respond to this racism with their own retorts. Many workers particularly dislike the Taiwanese employers, some of whom, according to two managers I spoke to, hit their staff. A common assertion from the workers is that the Taiwanese "are worse than the Boere".

BOTSHABELO'S CUSTOMERS

Although the rampant exploitation at Botshabelo would be easily uncovered by any company that wished to investigate its suppliers, the fact remains that it is the biggest and best-known names in South African retailing that are buying their goods from Botshabelo and places like it. Indeed, in the line of clothing, many companies were sewing in "name" labels at the point of production. They did not, however, declare that they were "Made in Botshabelo".

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BOTSHABELO AND SANCTIONS

It was a matter of some pride to some of the industrialists I spoke to that their goods were able to be exported from South Africa, often employing methods that were clearly designed to counteract the effect of the limited sanctions programme against South Africa.

This is very clearly one of the implicit aims of places such as Botshabelo, certainly as viewed by the state. The Israeli company that I interviewed provides an interesting case in point. They came to Botshabelo after having been approached by representatives of the South Africans in Israel. The offer was clearly too good to let pass.

To escape certain Israeli regulations, they changed the name of the company and shipped out \$450,000 of new sewing machinery to Botshabelo - this obviously having some impact on employment in Israel. They are now producing clothing items of an extremely high quality at Botshabelo. That is one half of the story.

Another reason they were keen to move out of Israel was because of that country's high inflation rate, which made it hard for them to maintain a 95% rate of export. They now claim to export out of Botshabelo, using the original contacts made in Israel, and route the goods through Zurich. The goods certainly do not proclaim that they were made in South Africa. In such a manner the clothes are sold throughout the EEC and, the manager asserted, into such outlets as British Home Stores in England.

Managers said that goods made in Botshabelo are sometimes routed through nearby Lesotho or, in the case of another firm, through Mauritius, where the labels are changed, thereby obscuring the real country of origin. Alternatively, the old method of hiding the source of goods by changing papers of goods at sea is employed.

One company claimed to be exporting at least 80% of its goods to the USA, while others export to Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia. Many companies do not export their goods at present, but made it very clear that it was a future priority. In the case of one Taiwanese company, a major reason for moving was that they found it difficult to export to the USA because of quota restrictions, and have found it easier to manufacture and export the same goods

from South Africa.

TRADE UNIONS

It came as no real surprise to find that the typical manager in Botshabelo displayed an openly hostile attitude to any attempts to unionise the workers. In fact, many of the local companies interviewed stated quite directly that one of their main reasons for moving was to avoid employing unionised labour.

Most companies did not employ a formal system to regulate industrial relations - indeed, many of them did not understand the question. They rather sought to rely on informal and arbitrary systems, expecting workers to come to them with their problems which would be "fairly" dealt with. In the one case where a company did have a system, the response was still illuminating: "We organise a workers committee that is democratically elected" (emphasis added).

With little or no protection, workers were very reluctant to individually present their demands to the management. As a result, they preferred to behave collectively for some protection and also, presumably, because the grievances were commonly felt. Some managers made racist comments, in this connection, about Africans therefore having what they describe as a "herd instinct".

A manager - recently arrived in Botshabelo - stated that one of the methods of controlling what he referred to as "agitators" was the blacklist of such employees, which was circulated by the Industrialists Association in Botshabelo.

Below are a few typical comments about trade unions;

- * "Unions just want to use the workers for political ends."
- * "In Taiwan unions are illegal. They are very bad, we don't want them. Here the black people stop working when they are with the unions."
- * "Told them to fuck-off." (3 respondents)
- * "We don't like them, unions only give you trouble. We feel that we are doing the best for our people." (This company was paying R15 per week and offered no sick pay, no maternity benefit, no pension.)

- decentralisation & exploitation

However, what was doubly interesting was the fact that the union that was being referred to was not any of the so-called "political unions", but rather a somewhat obscure outfit called Team Mates. They are based in Vereeniging, but have an office at Bloemfontein, where I spoke to one of the officials.

The official claimed that Team Mates had about 700 members at Botshabelo, although he kept on referring to them as "customers", which is - to put it mildly - an interesting term for a trade unionist to employ. He said that they were not a "political" union and, indeed, were strong supporters of the capitalist system.

It was clear that the union had very close links with the QwaQwa authorities. The official claimed that they had had a meeting with Chief Minister Mopeli, and it had been agreed that Team Mates was the union for QwaQwa, and that it was especially important to keep COSATU out of the region. He also said that they "had no problem with the police", and that he had many personal friends in the police force.

The reality of Team Mates' efforts on behalf of the workers in Botshabelo was made clear by one manager, who had dealt with Team Mates. "We were very co-operative with them. They paid our supervisor 20c per client she recruited for them". Eventually, Team Mates had about 400 members in that factory, and levied R4 per month for membership. The manager eventually agreed to collect the money from the workers - some R1,600 per month - and in exchange Team Mates agreed to make no demands. The majority of workers have since withdrawn from the union.

Team Mates obviously serves a very useful purpose to the government and the businessmen at Botshabelo. Firstly, they get clear preferential access to the workers, although even they have major problems making an impact, such is the attitude of most employers. Secondly, through their very inactivity, they give genuine trade unionism a bad name, and thus may serve to make workers very wary of any agencies working on their behalf.

CONCLUSION

After closely observing the conditions at Botshabelo, it is hard to come away with any impression other than that of business and the apartheid state working very closely together in the super-exploitation of the workers. Most managers were very complimentary

about the South African government and its agencies.

As far as the corruption of the businesses that were taking advantage of this "kindness" of the state, it is sobering to think that Botshabelo is but one of 49 such decentralisation points throughout South Africa. It is not necessary to name the companies involved - that would detract from the fact that it is not unscrupulous companies and bad individuals that are only to blame, but rather that it is the very system. What happens at Botshabelo is clearly not a mistake, but, rather, an example of the system working rather well.

What the state has done in Botshabelo is to forcibly move hundreds of thousands of people, uprooting their communities and destroying their social fabric. It has then invited businesses from all over South Africa and amongst South Africa's friends abroad, to come and take advantage of the misery it has created.

The state not only guarantees its friends their very high profits, but also uses its repressive machinery to make sure that such exploitation can carry on uninterrupted. The workers at Botshabelo can clearly expect no help from the state or the business community. They, somehow, have to organise themselves and link up with wider struggles for justice, although their isolation and continued state interference makes this difficult. As the South African government employs all of its propaganda agencies to show the world the results of the "immorality and double-standards" of the sanctions campaign, the claim is often made that what is needed to get rid of apartheid is not less foreign investment, but more of it - otherwise, "It will hurt the blacks of South Africa".

They are getting some of that desired foreign investment in Botshabelo. I have outlined some of the results. The investors in places such as Botshabelo - foreign and local - are doing nothing to abolish apartheid, but indeed come to Botshabelo and places like it because of the strength of apartheid's grip over people in such places. They are finding that apartheid is still very good for business. That, in short, is why apartheid cannot be reformed.

Assessing the proposed amendments to the LRA

Helen Seady

The Minister of Manpower has introduced a draft Bill to amend the Labour Relations Act No 28 of 1956 (The Act). For those whose work and rights are regulated by the Act, the need to amend the act is pressing, but are the proposed amendments satisfactory? What follows is a comment on some of the proposed changes to the existing law relating to unfair dismissal, unfair labour practice, conciliation procedures and restrictions on the right to strike.

UNFAIR DISMISSAL AND UNFAIR LABOUR PRACTICE

The Bill introduces a distinction between unfair dismissals and unfair labour practices, by defining them separately and making them mutually exclusive concepts, ie. an unfair dismissal cannot be regarded as an unfair labour practice. It is undesirable and impractical to draw this distinction since disputes involving dismissal are often closely linked to, and indivisible from, underlying unfair labour practices.

The criticism of the distinction is not merely theoretical because the Bill provides different channels for relief in respect of unfair dismissals and unfair labour practices. This means that where the conduct complained of is both an unfair dismissal and an unfair labour practice, the aggrieved party would have to follow two different procedures to obtain final relief: unfair dismissals must proceed in terms of section 45 of the Act which provides for arbitration by the Industrial Court (dealt with more fully below); and unfair labour practices are channeled through s46(9) of the Act for determination by the Industrial Court. In addition, problems of categorising the dispute correctly, and the raising of complex technical points will result, whereas a speedy and simple procedure for the resolution of disputes through the courts is essential. The Bill defines unfair dismissal in four subsections as follows:-

"unfair dismissal" any dismissal if -

(a) an employee's employment is terminated without a valid

- and fair reason;
- (b) reasonable notice has not been given before-hand by the employer to employees of the fact that the number of employees in the employ of the employer is to be retrenched and consultation with the employees or their trade union has not taken place and the selection of the employees to be dismissed is not reasonable;
 - (c) the employer has not given the employee a fair opportunity to state his case prior to dismissal: Provided that the non-compliance with this requirement only shall not be deemed to be an unfair dismissal unless the Industrial Court has ex post facto established that, notwithstanding the fact that the provisions of paragraphs (a) or (b) had been complied with, that in the circumstances it was necessary that the employee should have been given the opportunity to state his case; or
 - (d) a procedure agreed upon has not been followed at termination of employment;

The codification of the definition removes the flexibility of application that the court presently enjoys and fails to allow for the dynamic development of labour laws. Moreover, statutory definition will result in complex, technical arguments of interpretation and lead to protracted and costly litigation. Frustration and hostility to the court process by organised labour is a potential result that cannot be ignored.

The formulation of the four grounds on which a dismissal can be regarded as unfair is not entirely satisfactory: the definitions give rise to uncertainty and in particular, sub paragraph (b) of the definition is rigid and incompatible with conventional principles of fair retrenchment. It is also more restrictive than the principles already laid down by the industrial court.

The definition requires notice of retrenchment to be given to employees and not to their representative. Consultation prior to retrenchment may be with employees or their representative. As a result the proposed legislation permits employees to go behind the back of recognised representatives. This is contrary to established principles of fair retrenchment and desirable principles of collective bargaining. In addition, the definition does not satisfy the demand for full negotiation of retrenchment issues since the use of the word "consult" may be narrowly interpreted.

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The definition requires that the selection of employees for retrenchment must be reasonable, as opposed to fair. If any real protection is to be afforded to workers faced with loss of employment through retrenchment, the selection must be fair, - otherwise an employer will be permitted to make his selection on a basis that is reasonable, but not necessarily fair.

The above comments illustrate the unsatisfactory result of an attempt to capture, in a concise definition, the complex principles of fair retrenchment established through the courts and collective bargaining arrangements.

The new procedure for unfair dismissal cases is contained in section 45A, an entirely new section that the Bill proposes to insert into the Act.

There are three stages to the procedure:

Stage 1

In terms of the new procedure the Industrial Court will not be able to hear an unfair dismissal case unless the chairman of the industrial council or conciliation board to which the dispute was referred, is of the opinion that the dispute has not been resolved.

Stage 2

If the chairman decides that the dispute has not been resolved, then a party to the dispute can refer it to the Industrial Court within 7 days of the date on which the final meeting of the council was held, or if a conciliation board is involved, within 7 days of the expiry of the board. The referral of the dispute must be accompanied by a report from the chairman of the industrial council or conciliation board.

Stage 3

On the basis of the report, the Industrial Court will decide whether to arbitrate the dispute, to refer the dispute back to the industrial council or conciliation board or refuse to arbitrate.

All three stages of the proposed procedure present problems. At the first stage, the fact that the decision lies with the

chairman is unsatisfactory. He may be of the opinion that the dispute has been resolved. A party to the dispute may not share this opinion and that party will be deprived of taking the dispute up with the Industrial Court. In addition, the meaning of the word "resolved" is not clear. What is to happen where the parties to the industrial council "resolve" the dispute, but the dispute remains unresolved between the actual parties? The way to ensure that this situation does not arise is for the legislation to state clearly that the dispute must be resolved as between the parties to the dispute.

The first criticism to be levelled at Stage 2 of the proposed procedure is that the time periods allowed are not clearly fixed. The section requires a party to refer the dispute to the court within 7 days of the final meeting of the industrial council. If the council does not call a final meeting, a party to the dispute will be blocked from reaching the industrial court. Alternatively, technical arguments as to whether a meeting is a final meeting in terms of the section will swamp the Industrial Court and the councils. The time period in respect of conciliation boards is even less certain, because the proposed amendment to section 36(1) of the Act allows the local labour inspector to extend the initial 30 day period at the request of one party (see below). These factors will lead to indeterminate delays and unscrupulous unions and employers blocking disputes from reaching the court.

The court's decision on whether to arbitrate will depend upon the report of the chairman. This is undesirable for two reasons: first, parties are denied automatic access to the court in respect of unfair dismissal cases and secondly, it is undesirable to give the chairman the role of defining and motivating the dispute. As a person not directly interested in the dispute he may not feel inclined to submit his report with any haste and his formulation of the dispute may be slanted.

The court will decide on whether it will arbitrate on the basis of the chairman's report and a number of other factors listed in the section. These include the existence of wage regulating measures, whether the dispute arises solely out of a question of law and whether the parties have taken all reasonable steps to settle the dispute. These criteria have been adopted from the present requirements for the establishment of a conciliation board and are in many instances not appropriate to disputes over dismissal. In addition, if the court wants to satisfy itself of the existence of

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these criteria, the parties will feel obliged to place this information before the court and this will lead to a resurrection of the old conciliation board procedures which the legislation specifically abolishes (see the proposed amendments to section 35 of the Act discussed below.)

The draft Bill replaces the present definition of "unfair labour practice" with the following definition:

"unfair labour practice" -

- (a) any labour practice where -
 - (i) a trade union or employer's organisation makes use of unconstitutional, unfair or misleading methods of canvassing members;
 - (ii) an employer, an employee, a trade union or an employers' organisation has not complied with or has failed to observe any prohibition in terms of this Act;
 - (iii) an employee is replaced by another employee on conditions of employment which are or may be less favourable than those which were applicable to the replaced employee;
 - (iv) an employee, trade union or federation directly or indirectly boycotts any product or in any way supports such a boycott or participates therein, where such product is manufactured, sold or distributed by an employer who is not involved in a dispute with the employee or members of the trade union or federation concerned;
 - (v) an employee or employer is on the grounds of race, sex or religion unfairly discriminated against;
 - (vi) an employer unreasonably fails or refuses to negotiate, on an industrial council or otherwise, with a trade union which is representative of the employees employed by such employer or a group of employees who represent a specific interest;
 - (vii) a trade union unreasonably fails or refuses to negotiate, on an Industrial Council or otherwise, with an employer or employers' organisation where the trade union is representative of the employees employed by such employer or a group of employees who represent a specific interest;
 - (viii) a trade union directly or indirectly hinders an

- employer to negotiate with employees employed by him or some of them, who are not members of such a trade union;
- (ix) an employer's organisation or trade union takes action or concludes an agreement with regard to the relationship between employer and employee without the prior authorisation of its members;
 - (x) an employer, an employers' organisation, an employee or a trade union fails or refuses to comply with an enforceable collective agreement; and
- (b) any other labour practice which has the effect that-
- (i) any employee's or class of employee's employment opportunities or work security is prejudiced or jeopardized thereby;
 - (ii) the business of any employer or class of employer is unfairly affected or disrupted;
 - (iii) labour unrest is created or promoted;
 - (iv) the relationship between employer and employee is detrimentally affected:

Provided that the following labour practices shall not be deemed to be unfair labour practices:

- (i) A strike or lock-out which is not prohibited in terms of section 65;
- (ii) any practice which has been agreed upon: Provided that the agreement is not in force for longer than three years;
- (iii) the re-employment of dismissed workers: Provided that such re-employment is done by means of objective criteria and that the criteria is fairly applied;
- (iv) an unfair dismissal.

The objections to statutory codification and the criticism of distinguishing between unfair dismissals and unfair labour practice have been dealt with already.

Sub-paragraph (a)(i) of the definition makes it an unfair labour practice for a union or employer's organisation to adopt "unconstitutional, unfair or misleading methods of canvassing

members". A union's methods of canvassing members, provided the methods are legal, is a matter which should properly be regulated by its constitution and between it and its members. In any event, the present definition of unfair labour practice is sufficiently wide to cover the situation of malpractices in recruitment of members.

Sub-paragraph (a) (ii) makes it an unfair labour practice for anyone or any body to fail to comply with an act or omission prohibited by the Labour Relations Act. As things stand at present, the Act makes it a criminal offence to do, or fail to do, something prohibited by the Act, so this definition does not appear to add anything essential to the current legislation.

Sub-paragraph (a) (iii). Rumour has it that this clause was inserted into the Bill to appease certain white workers who fear that they may be edged out of their jobs by lesser paid black workers. The clause, however, is sufficiently wide to apply to attempts to exploit lesser-paid women and the replacement of black workers by blacks and may prove to be a useful tool for progressive unions.

Sub-paragraph (a) (iv) This clause seeks to limit secondary industrial action, an increasingly powerful weapon in the battle for social justice in South Africa. The language used is unclear and open to various interpretations.

Sub-paragraph (a) (v) Insofar as this clause expressly restricts discrimination on the basis of race, sex or religion, it must be welcomed, but protection from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, marital status, sexual orientation, disablement and political convictions remains lacking. The definition deals only with "unfair discrimination" on grounds of race, sex or religion, implying that there may be instances where such discrimination is fair. Clearly this cannot be.

Sub-paragraph (a) (vi) The move to establish a statutory duty to bargain in good faith is to be welcomed, but the formulation of the provision is problematic. It can be interpreted in such a way as to require an employer to negotiate with a representative trade union or a group of employees who represent a specific interest. Allowing this option opens the door to abuse and deliberate frustration by recalcitrant employers and minority trade unions. In short it constitutes an unacceptable infringement

on collective bargaining. However, the wording used in sub-paragraph (a)(vii) suggests that this interpretation is not correct and that employers have a duty to negotiate with a trade union which is either representative of the majority of its workers or a group of workers who represent a specific interest. A positive result of the provision is that it does not allow for plant level negotiations to be dispensed with in situations where negotiations are being conducted at Industrial Council level (as the Industrial Court has done).

Sub-paragraph (a)(viii) undermines the principle of the majoritarian model of collective bargaining and allows for all comers. This will lead to a proliferation of unions at the workplace and an unacceptable infringement of a union's legitimate right to acquire exclusive bargaining rights in respect of a unit of workers, the majority of whom it represents. Representative unions will lose the right, (fundamental to collective bargaining) to exert pressure on an employer to deal only with itself: to insist on this will amount to an unfair labour practice.

The absence of a reference to practices that detrimentally effect the physical, economic, moral or social welfare of employees in sub-paragraph (b) means that the Industrial Court cannot enquire into and redress unfair labour practices in the area of health and safety and sexual harassment of workers. This is a backward step from the present definition which incorporates these areas.

In terms of clause (i) of the exclusions, legal strikes are not regarded as unfair labour practices. Whilst this is a positive development, the inference that all illegal strikes will be unfair labour practices is unsatisfactory since considerations of the reasonableness and justification for the strike action are ignored.

Clause (iii) allows for selective re-employment of workers provided employers use objective criteria for the selection (and apply these criteria fairly). This is most undesirable because criteria that are "objective" (eg. union affiliation, religious convictions) may be manifestly unfair, and the fair application of such criteria does not cure the injustice. A guarantee for dismissed workers against arbitrariness, victimisation and prejudice in re-employment is essential. It is suggested that this will be achieved if employers are required to adopt fair selection criteria for re-employment and to apply such criteria in a fair

manner. The shortcomings of the proposed clause are all the more disheartening in view of its failure to incorporate the principles of fair re-employment adopted by the Industrial Court in past cases.

The exclusion of unfair dismissal from the definition of unfair labour practice has been dealt with already.

The exclusion of certain practices from the definition of unfair labour practice is subject to the criticisms of codification set out above.

STREAMLINING THE CONCILIATION PROCESS

The proposed amendments to section 35 of the Act will significantly simplify the procedure for applying for the establishment of a conciliation board. Most of the onerous requirements contained in the present Act have been deleted by the Bill and the local labor inspector, to whom the application is submitted, is obliged to establish the board. This is an important advance on the present position where the Minister of Manpower has a wide discretion to appoint or refuse a Conciliation Board. The principle of simplifying and streamlining the procedures is supported, but the time periods fixed by the Bill for the bringing of the application [within 30 days of the dispute and where the dispute concerns an unfair dismissal, 14 days] is impractical, especially given the size of the country, the difficulty of communication and access to legal advisers. In addition, the proposed time limits will undermine dispute settling procedures contained in recognition agreements where these procedures take longer than 30 days to exhaust, and discourage negotiation between the parties prior to bringing applications. The present requirement that the application be made within a reasonable time is preferable.

The proposed amendment to section 37 of the Act specifies that a minimum of three, and a maximum of seven representatives may attend a conciliation board. This will create difficulties for individuals who apply for a conciliation board by requiring them to find two more representatives to attend the board, and unions seeking to have larger negotiating teams at the meetings of the conciliation board. If proper conciliation is to be achieved, the number of representatives allowed to attend conciliation boards should not be fixed by the statute.

THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

The freedom to strike is further curtailed by the proposed amendments to section 65 of the Act. Strikes embarked upon before the expiry of the conciliation procedures provided by the Act are illegal. The present position is worsened since the local labour inspector can extend the 30 day period for conciliation boards to resolve disputes at the request of one party to the dispute (see the proposed amendment to section 36 of the Act). This will lead to indeterminate delays and abuse by a recalcitrant party, which, in turn, could lead to the abrogation of conciliation procedures and an increase in wild-cat industrial action.

Further restrictions on the right to strike are introduced by making strikes illegal where disputes over unfair dismissal have been referred back to a conciliation board or Industrial Council in terms of section 45A of the proposed act. In other words, workers can no longer engage in legal strike action in respect of a matter referred to the Industrial Court for determination. An obstructive employer can delay legal strike action by setting into motion the new machinery provided for in s45A of the Bill.

The proposed amendments make secondary strike action illegal. This removes an indispensable element of a union's power and alters the existing balance of power in favour of employers. Apart from the objections in principle to the proposed amendment, the wording is very wide and may lead to problems of interpretation and reliance on the restriction in situations not intended by the legislature.

In terms of the proposed amendments, intermittent strikes on the same dispute within a 15 month period, will also be illegal. The introduction of this restriction is obviously intended to deal with the situation where short strikes (with a threat of future strike action) are called, thus maximising the effect of disrupting production. It is often the very threat of the resumption of the strike that forces an employer to negotiate. By making this type of threat illegal, the result will be that striking workers will not return to work pending a settlement of the dispute (by the conclusion of an agreement or otherwise) and the settlement of disputes will be less likely since positions will be entrenched to safeguard the legality of the strike. Once again, the actual wording is very confusing and open to various interpretations.

Restricting the right to strike is unlikely to reduce the number

of strikes and some of the provisions proposed may well have the opposite effect. Bearing in mind that illegal strike action is a criminal offence, the proposed further restrictions on legal strike action are quite unacceptable. Criminal prosecutions and police intervention will never promote industrial peace.

One can weigh up the good and the bad in the proposed amendments to the Act, but until more careful thought has been given to its effects, the Bill in its present form should not be made law.

“Factory vrouens”

REVIEW: Factory Vrouens - Die Waarlike Lewe van die Werkendeklas Vrou, a play presented at the History Workshop Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, 10 - 13 February 1987; compiled from the writings and documents of the garment workers by Elsabe Brink and directed by Alwyn Swart.

In the 1930s and 40s the Garment Workers' Union was one of the strongest trade unions in South Africa. Its members were mainly white Afrikaner women who worked as machinists in the clothing factories on the Witwatersrand. Under the leadership of its general secretary Solly Sachs the union was forged into a militant organisation which challenged the exploitative practices of clothing bosses. Arising out of their experience in the union and in the factories the women of the Garment Workers' Union began to express themselves in plays, poems and short stories. It is these writings which Elsabe Brink has brought together to form the script of Factory Vrouens.

For the purposes of the play Brink has divided the writings of the garment workers into four distinct areas. Firstly the play looks at the life of the garment workers before they left the land and the pressures that forced them to go and seek work in the clothing factories. It then moves onto the life in the slums of Johannesburg and Germiston where many of them lived upon arrival in the city. The play then portrays the forms of extreme exploitation in the clothing factories which the workers had to endure - speeding up, low wages, long hours of work, filthy and noisy factories.

Finally it tells of their struggle to better their conditions at work and at home by organising into a strong militant trade union.

What comes across most strongly in these writings of the garment workers, and in their enthusiastic depiction on stage by students of the University's school of dramatic art, is that they reflect a militant tradition among white Afrikaner women workers. For many of us today who are witnessing the militancy of black workers it is hard to realise that only some forty years ago a group of white women workers were espousing the cause of socialism.

White Afrikaans women today perhaps represent the most conservative element in South African society. Yet, as the play clearly shows, this hasn't always been the case. These women engaged in many strikes, wrote socialist literature and participated fully in trade union activities.

Thus possibly the most stirring moment in the play is when the Red Flag is sung in Afrikaans:

Dus steek omhoog die rooibanier,
Wat leef en dood sal ons regeer,
Die lafaards spot, verraaiers lag,
Maar ons staan by die Rooie-vlag!

The obvious question which must arise is what has happened to that militant tradition among white Afrikaner women. Unfortunately the play does not set out to answer this question for us as it is only concerned with the 1930s and 40s.

While to the purist these writings of the garment workers put together for this play may not represent "good theatre" they must be seen as part of a process in the politicisation and unionisation of the workers. They were specifically written as propaganda pieces by Solly Sachs and various members of the union to organise and rally other workers behind the union. As such their appeal is to workers and it is remarkable that many workers who saw the play could associate with the struggles of the Afrikaner workers which were depicted.

But while Factory Vrouens is very strong in its portrayal of a militant tradition among white Afrikaner workers it fails to come to grips with the context in which much of the garment workers' literature was produced. The problem is that in the play this literature is seen as having been ignored and that it should be

- factory vrouens -

added to the mainstream Afrikaans literature of the period. In fact the writings of the garment workers lay claim to a different cultural heritage to that of mainstream Afrikaans literature of the time.

Most of the Afrikaans literature of the 1930s and 40s was written with one aim in mind: to promote the Afrikaner Nationalist movement. The Afrikaans petty-bourgeoisie was attempting to forge a culture which would unite all Afrikaners irrespective of class into an Afrikaner nation.

The Garment Workers' Union, on the other hand, was trying to arouse class awareness among its members. It aimed to show that the workers were first and foremost part of the working class. The writings of the garment workers depicted in the play thus portray a working class experience. This was not the same "classless" culture which the Afrikaner petty-bourgeoisie was trying to promote!

It is little wonder therefore that the Nationalists saw the Garment Workers' Union as a threat to its plans to promote the idea of a united Afrikaner nation. A concerted campaign was launched by the Nationalists to wrest the union leadership away from Sachs and to gain control of the union themselves. It was in response to this attack that both the members and leaders of the union went on a splurge of writing plays, poems and short stories in Afrikaans on which this play is based.

The writings of the garment workers thus arise out of a fundamental conflict with "mainstream" Afrikaner writings rather than through any similarity. Through an understanding of this conflict one would have been able to grasp the significance of what the workers were expressing in their writings.

Factory Vrouens is thus a very important play for its enthusiastic depiction of a militant white working class culture. But by placing the writings of the garment workers in the context in which they arose it could have made an even more valuable contribution to our understanding of working class organisation and culture in South Africa.

(Leslie Witz, March 1987)

Economic notes for trade unions

The annual rate of inflation stays high, in the 15% to 18% range. The latest figures are for February 1987, when, on average, prices are 16,3% higher than a year before.

	Consumer Price Index (1980=100) February 1987	Annual rate of inflation (% increases over 1 year) February 1987
Cape Town	250,8	17,3%
Port Elizabeth	244,3	16,3%
East London	230,7	15,7%
Durban	247,6	14,7%
Pietermaritzburg	250,8	14,5%
Witwatersrand	250,9	16,0%
Vaal Triangle	256,1	15,8%
Pretoria	265,3	18,8%
Klerksdorp	251,1	21,7%
Bloemfontein	232,4	13,0%
OFS Goldfields	259,5	15,4%
Kimberley	237,1	13,8%
SOUTH AFRICA	251,0	16,3%

Source: Central Statistical Services

Because prices go up, the buying power of money falls. This means that wages must rise at least as fast as prices rise if workers' living standards are to stay the same. For an improvement in living standards, wages must go up more than prices. This is part of the demand for a living wage. Because of inflation, negotiation for a living wage only begins above 16%.

Bosses show the way on pay

The bosses and the government often call on workers to reduce their wage demands. They say that lower wage increases will allow the economy to strengthen and more jobs to be created. But what about the bosses pay?

A new survey of company directors pay has just been completed by

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the Labour Research Service in Cape Town. Last year, on average, company director's pay rose by R256 PER WEEK! (18%). This compares with a rise of R12 a week (11%), on average, for black workers.

The directors' pay survey covers 116 companies listed on the Stock Exchange and includes the major mining houses as well as 69 of the "Top Hundred" companies chosen by the Financial Mail. The average pay for directors worked out at R1,680 PER WEEK. But the top-earners got a lot more:

TOP TEN LEAGUE TABLE

Company	Average Weekly Pay for Directors in 1986	
	Average Pay	% rise
ANGLO	R6,410	80%
TRENCOR	R4,298	25%
ABERCOM	R4,269	77%
ANGLOVAAL	R4,253	56%
E L BATEMAN	R3,953	44%
BARLOW RAND	R3,692	9%
MALBAK	R3,690	73%
RAND MINES	R3,654	27%
PLATE GLASS	R3,511	14%
BEARES	R3,352	11%

Anglo American leads the league for directors pay. The 27 Anglo directors shared R9 million in 1986. That is R333,000 each per year, or R6,410 per week. Even this is just an average figure. Some of the directors, like Mr Relly, the chairman, get far more than this.

Also, directors get still more money from the shares they own in companies and from their "perks" - the special cars, houses, holidays and loans they get from the company. A British survey found that these non-cash benefits add another 40% to the earnings of most company directors.

Meanwhile, Mr Kent Durr, the deputy minister of finance, told a meeting in Cape Town that "more than 56% of South Africans live in households with a total income of less than R400 a month".

(Labour Research Service, P.O. Box 376, Salt River, 7925)

SALB Publication Guidelines

The South African Labour Bulletin is a journal which supports the democratic labour movement in South Africa. It is a forum for analysing, debating and recording the aims and activities of this movement. To this end, it requires contributors to the Bulletin to conform with the following publication guidelines.

* Constructive criticism of unions or federations in the democratic labour movement is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.

* Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

analytical articles	8,000 words
debate, reviews, documents, reports	5,000 words
briefings	1,000 words

Articles should be submitted in a final and correct form and in duplicate. Articles are refereed and may be edited. In the event of the editors deciding that other than minor editing changes are required, the article will be referred back to the author.

Briefings should concern topical events and developments of concern to the democratic labour movement. They should be easy to understand and keep footnotes and references to a minimum. Debate, reviews, reports and documents are designed to make more widely available important statements emanating from the labour movement; reviewing new literature or other material of relevance to the movement; making available more in-depth reports and research; and allowing for debate on important contemporary issues.

* Contributions must be written in a language that is clear and understandable.

* All contributions to the Bulletin must be typed and where applicable include proper footnoting and references.

* Except in the case of public documents, all submissions to the Bulletin will be treated in confidence.

* The editors reserve the right to recommend to the author of any submission that it be placed under another category to that under which it was submitted.

* For more details contact the editor.

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