

# South African Labour Bulletin

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Interviews · Cyril Ramaphosa · Berni Fanaroff  
Tselepo Disaster · Recognition Agreements  
IATWA · Coca-Cola · Maternity  
Naidoo Speech · Productivity  
regulation · Namibian Trade Unions  
Poverty · Reviews · Economic Notes

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**Organising local authority workers**  
*Letane Markham*

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# South African Labour Bulletin

**volume 12 number 4 May/June 1987**

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## **The South African Labour Bulletin**

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# SATS: "No" to SARHWU

The one month old strike at the South African Transport Services (SATS) by members of the South African Railways and Harbours Union (SARHWU) has been characterised by managements's refusal to recognise SARHWU as the union representing the majority of striking employees. SATS preferred to deal with tame unions. Management argued that BLATU, the company recognised union, represented the majority of workers, and that all negotiations should be conducted through BLATU. On the contrary, SARHWU claimed, on the twentieth day of the strike their membership had increased to 20,000. Initially the union had approximately only 10,000 paid-up members. according to the Transvaal regional secretary, Johannes Ngocobo, workers identified more closely with the position articulated by SARHWU and management's reluctance to recognise the union has confirmed to workers that the objective of SATS is to prevent the presence of structures that would allow workers to question SATS management control over workers. On April 16 1987 the union reported that the strike has spread as far as Louis Trichardt and Bloemfontein where 1,200 workers were affected. At present there are more than 20,000 railway workers on strike. (21.4.87)

## How to break the strike

To the SATS management the question has been one of how to deal with the strike in such a way that workers struggle on the railways is not taken further. SATS has evolved various techniques for breaking the strike. The meetings held with the workers negotiating committee seem not to have been an attempt by management to resolve the dispute, but a strategy to split the workers. The union claimed that at one meeting held with the negotiating committee, management had sent people around to all places that were on strike in order to fetch one or two workers to join the negotiations. This was an attempt to create divisions amongst the workers. Management failed after the negotiating team explained to those workers invited by management that the team had been delegated by workers to meet management. This group of workers decided to remain as observers only.

## Pull in white unemployed and students

The present unemployment crisis in the "white" population has also



- Sats strike -

been used to advantage to meet the present work load in various depots and stations. Unemployed white workers and white students on school holidays have been pulled in to take over the jobs of strikers. The Johannesburg station manager was reported as saying the station was operating satisfactorily with the help of everyone from senior officials down to junior clerks. He claimed that SATS white-collar workers were boosting their salaries by working overtime to keep the Johannesburg station on the go. In Kempton Park 750 white youths were hired to clean the station.

Management has cancelled workers bonuses. This was an attempt to demoralise workers, but it failed, and workers carried on with the strike.



photo: white labour at Park Station at R15 a day [Afrapix]

### Detentions

Detentions have also characterised the intervention of the state in the dispute. On April 9 the union claimed approximately 400 workers arrested; 21 were held under the state of emergency regulations, and the remaining workers were held under the Intimidation Act. SATS management claimed that strikers were intimidating workers who were prepared to work. The union denied

knowledge of any assaults. [further details censored under emergency regulations]

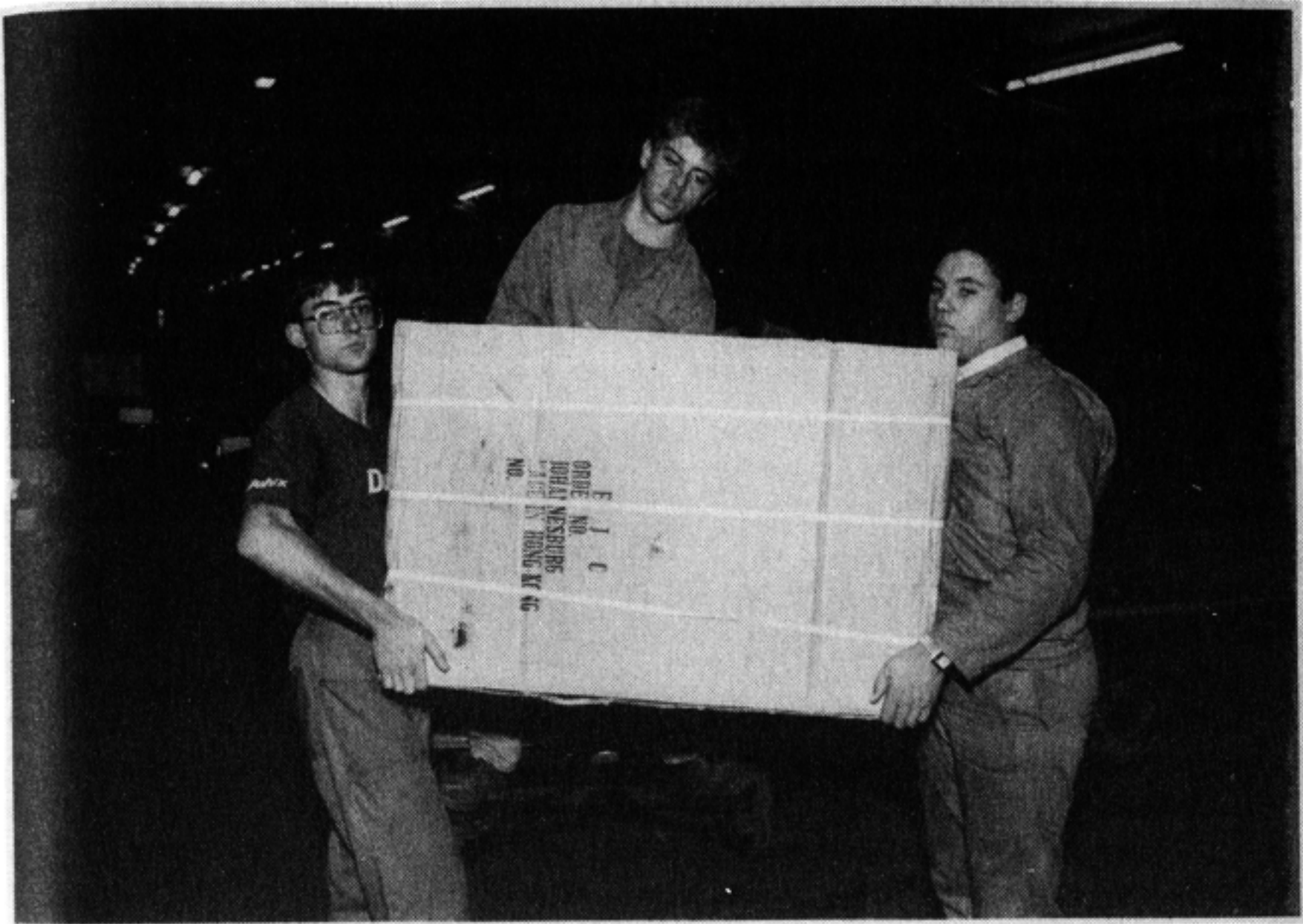


photo: white schoolchildren scabbing at Joburg station [Afrapix]

### 300 arrested under the state of emergency

Police action was intensified when 300 SARHWU members were detained under the state of emergency at Ogies. According to the union these workers were arrested while on their way to the union's offices, but the Bureau for Information daily report said the workers were detained under the state of emergency as they had "gathered illegally". It appears the state has adopted a strategy of detaining strikers on the pretext that they are protecting workers who are prepared to work, or that strikers had "gathered illegally".

### SATS denounces COSATU's offer

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) also offered to help resolve the dispute, but management accused it of seeking to "overthrow the status quo". SATS spokesperson, Mr Jannie Van



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Zyl, summed up SATS response to the offer as follows:

It would be naive for SATS to negotiate with a union, which, as pointed out, seeks to overthrow the status quo not only of SATS but also other industries of our economy.



photo: press conference at COSATU House; left to right - Jay Naidoo (COSATU general secretary), Justice Langa (SARHWU president), Mike Roussos (SARHWU education secretary) [Afrapix]

SATS became more "kragdadig" on the last meeting held with the workers negotiating committee. Workers had a proposal that the dispute be referred to arbitration. The arbitrator would be mutually agreed by both parties. SATS responded by stating they were no longer willing to meet the negotiating team. In fact at that meeting their negotiator had just come to present management's statement and to dissolve the negotiating team. The negotiator also pointed out that the dismissal case of Andrew Nendzamba (see previous issue) could only be handled according to the SATS disciplinary code, and that management was not prepared to discuss their disciplinary code or any grievances that the workers might have with anyone but the recognised unions at SATS.

### Threats

The latest attempt to break the strike has involved threats to evict the workers from their hostel. In Kokstad management gave notice of its intention to evict more than 400 workers from the hostels. Management has also threatened to sue the union. This threat did not have any significant effect, given the militancy of workers exhibited during the strike. Looking at the SATS responses to the dispute so far, it is clear that management is not prepared to reach any settlement with workers. The management settlement with workers or SARHWU as such would create space for workers to question the exploitative material conditions prevailing in the railway industry. SARHWU's reaction to this position is summed up as follows:

It seems that the only course left open to us at this point is to find different ways of putting pressure to management in order to force them back to the negotiating table with a more responsible attitude towards settling the dispute.

### Support for the strike

Discussion with other COSATU affiliates and UDF affiliates has taken place. As far as the COSATU affiliates are concerned the results of the discussion with SARHWU are not yet clear. COSATU telexed the Minister of Transport, Dr Eli Louw, to ask him to intervene. The Federated Chamber of Industries and the Associated Chamber of Commerce were also telexed to pressure SATS to talk to SARHWU. To what extent this approach will be successful in producing a settlement between SATS and SARHWU remains to be seen. ASSACOM later replied that they were not prepared to be involved in the dispute.

Attempts by SARHWU are underway to get railway workers on a solidarity strike nationwide. Demands raised were as follows:

- \* unconditional reinstatement of Andrew Nendzamba
- \* full payment for the days that workers have not been physically involved in their normal work procedure
- \* workers to have the representation of their choice

[further details censored under emergency regulations]

Control had collapsed on the passenger trains as ticket examiners



- Sats strike -

in the third class coaches - mostly used by workers - could not be replaced by white scabs. In Soweto, trains were set alight on April 14 and 15, but any direct connection between this action and the strikers is not clear as nobody claimed responsibility for the action.

SATS vaguely put the blame on SARHWU. In response to this allegation, SARHWU was reported as seeking legal advice. Nevertheless indications were such that the strike was beginning to have an effect in the townships. It has been reported that passengers were arrested during the train burning incidents but the Bureau for Information in Pretoria denied this and instead claimed that "The South African Transport Services Police, assisted by the South African Police, rounded up the passengers and took them to the police station to check if any were injured." According to the Bureau spokesperson, "no one was injured."

Violent attacks against trains continued until the Easter holidays. By April 18, 50 train coaches were reported to be damaged by fire. To protect its property the state utilised SADF troops to guard all strategic depots and property including railway stations. In addition SATS issued an ultimatum to strikers to return to work on Monday April 20 or face dismissal. However the ultimatum was later extended to April 21. SATS claimed that it was prepared to talk to the strikers' representatives (but not SARHWU) provided workers go back to work. The SATS ultimatum may reflect an attempt to gain support from its white right-wing employees who were keen to have strikers dismissed. Already long queues of white job seekers had presented themselves in some strike affected areas, and to dismiss the strikers would boost votes for the National Party in the general election on May 6.

The intention to dismiss strikers was viewed by some circles in the ruling class as provocative. Labour consultants started blaming SATS for the prolonged strike. Mr Mike Miles, director of the South African Institute of Labour Relations was reported to say that the refusal of SATS management to accept the legitimate demands of the union was frustrating the bargaining process and creating increasing tensions. "If people cannot get their requests and grievances addressed by legitimate means, they resort to more radical methods." Surely the state and employers know this. It appears Mr Miles is blaming SATS for not having developed techniques to contain the workers' resistance - and so save other sectors of the economy from becoming involved in the dispute.

The majority of workers on strike who did not go to work on April 22 were considered fired. Police were reported to have confronted workers on the morning of the 22nd at Germiston. They forced their way into a hall where a meeting of strikers was being held. Sjam-boks and R-1 rifles were used to force workers out of the hall. Shots were fired, and three workers were killed.

At mid-day a physical confrontation between workers and police took place at Doornfontein station which left 3 workers shot dead and several other workers and police injured. Later that afternoon approximately 200 policemen cordoned off COSATU house in Johannesburg. Nobody was allowed to enter the building. People inside - including SARHWU members who were holding a meeting - were reluctant to leave the building and later police forced their way in. Almost all offices in the COSATU building were ransacked, and SARHWU members were detained.

On April 23 6,000 strikers were reported to be dismissed and according to SATS spokesperson, Dirk Beukes, a further 10,000 were to be dismissed the next day. SARHWU's response was an urgent application for an undertaking by Law and Order Minister, Adriaan Vlok that his men would not interfere in future with meetings organised by striking workers. This application was postponed to April 27. SARHWU is also taking legal action against SATS on the grounds that the dismissals were illegal.

COSATU in the meantime has obtained an undertaking from the police that they would not unlawfully disrupt or interfere with the lawful conduct of COSATU or its affiliates at the Germiston office. The police also agreed not to unlawfully assault, intimidate or interfere with people present at the office. The same undertaking has been obtained in regard to COSATU House. An application regarding the ransacking of COSATU House has been postponed, but an undertaking has been obtained from the police not to unlawfully assault workers detained on the 22nd.

COSATU has since called for a two-day nation-wide protest on May 5 and 6 (coinciding with the white general election); this call was made jointly with the South African Youth Congress, National Students Co-ordinating Committee, South African National Students Congress, NECC, and UDF. According to COSATU's Jay Naidoo, the events of the 22nd "were the last straw."

(Jabu Matiko, April 1987)



- Sats strike -

SARHWU members killed 22nd April 1987

Joseph Mampuru  
Zanemuula Christopher Jozana  
Mlahleni Mahlakametsa  
Jeremiah Diutwileng  
Zonwabele Alcon Mrubata  
Moses Mogopa

STOP PRESS: Security forces again surround COSATU House, 29.4.87

## Ermelo disaster The growing methane menace

There can be few modern collieries in the world that have such a poor safety record as Gencor's Ermelo colliery. The recent explosion there - which killed 34 miners - was the third methane disaster at the mine within five years. In November 1982 eleven workers died in an explosion and again in October 1984 six miners died from carbon monoxide poisoning after a methane explosion.

Methane explosions have always been one of the greatest sources of hazard faced by coal miners. Methane is produced during the formation of coal from organic material. Whenever coal is mined it is inevitable that trapped methane will be released at the same time. But with modern technology, most major coal mining countries have controlled the hazard and explosions are rare events. The most important steps to prevent explosions are good ventilation to dilute methane with fresh air, the use of "flameproof" machines which do not cause sparks that can ignite methane, and the use of modern detection devices to warn about dangerous levels of methane.

At Ermelo it appears that a massive amount of methane, which had accumulated in an area that was not being worked, ignited. Poisonous carbon monoxide produced by the explosion caused the fatalities, rather than the blast itself or burns from the heat of the blast. Fortunately self rescuers which produce oxygen were available - otherwise the death toll may have been even higher.

However, some of the self rescuers seem to have been stored in a way that made them difficult to reach. Some workers were overcome before they could reach the self rescuers or activate them.

In the 1970s methane explosions were relatively rare events in South African collieries and did not contribute substantially to the overall fatality rate. Altogether 42 miners died in three accidents. But in the 1980s, as can be seen from the bar chart, a tragically different picture has emerged. While the overall fatality rate has dropped dramatically since the NUM challenged safety standards at the 1983 Hlobane disaster inquest, at least 166 miners have died in methane explosions in the 80s already.

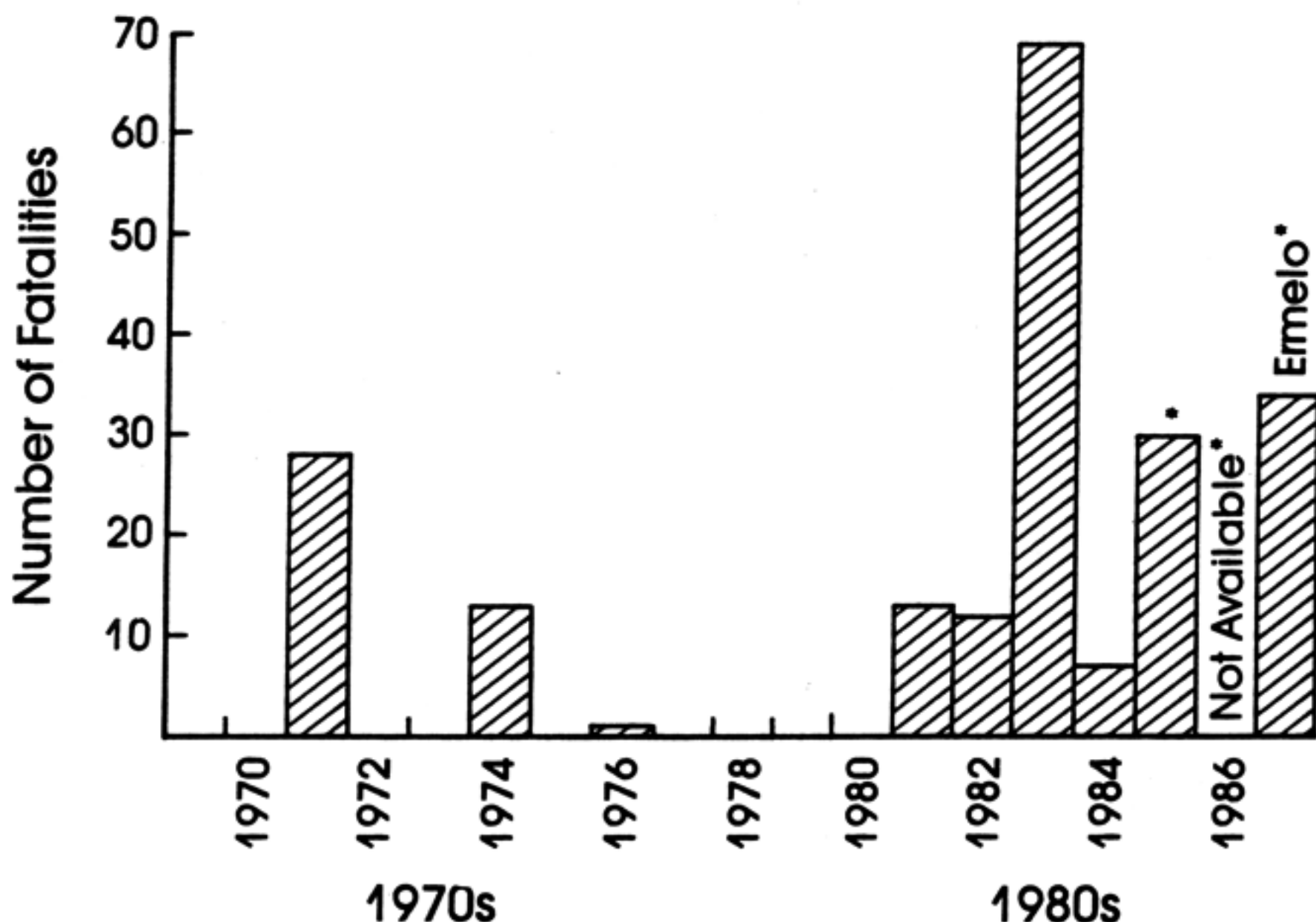
The specific reasons for this four hundred percent increase are unclear. Except for the Hlobane disaster, technical analyses of explosions have not been published. In fact, a disturbing aspect is that the Government Mining Engineer appears reluctant to hold inquiries into major disasters, even though this is required by the Mines and Works Act. Lessons that may have been learnt from previous disasters are being lost. Eighteen months have passed since the Middelbult explosion killed thirty miners. The findings of an inquiry into this disaster - if it had been held promptly - may have helped prevent the latest Ermelo disaster. Apparently Middelbult mine management is to be charged with culpable homicide but the case has not yet begun. However, a culpable homicide case does not facilitate an open investigation into the causes of an accident. Unions concerned about the accident are excluded from introducing relevant evidence, and managers on trial are naturally likely to portray their role as favourably as possible. (Kinross management is also to be charged with culpable homicide for last years fire which killed 177 miners, without an inquiry being held)

A possible factor in the increase in colliery explosions is that the use of more productive machines has resulted in coal being mined at a faster rate. This in turn may have caused methane to be released into the mines at a much faster rate, thus becoming a more serious hazard. Clearly a thorough re-evaluation of ventilation, training, methane inspection and detection (both the methanometers used by miners and the detection systems installed permanently in mines), flameproofing of machines, the mining regulations and self-rescuers is now urgent. If the current trend is not reversed, hundreds of workers could die in explosions, even though the necessary technology is available to control this hazard.

(Jean Leger, April 1987)



## METHANE EXPLOSION FATALITIES IN SA COAL MINES



**\*Note:** Figures for 1985 to 1987 have not yet been published. The figures given here refer only to major explosions that have been published in the media.

## Recognition agreements – an evaluation

South African independent trade unions gained basic union rights over recent years by concluding recognition agreements with bosses and through hard struggle. Management now attempts to take away these rights by delaying the process of negotiating recognition agreements. Management bogs down trade unions in negotiating unreasonably long agreements and demands that unions must sign these agreements before being granted basic trade union rights such as stop-order facilities, shop-steward recognition, access to the

factory and the right to negotiate substantive issues such as wage increases and working conditions. Managements' delaying tactic is an attempt to keep union officials out of the factories and to undermine union structures inside the factory. The emerging tendency is now for trade unions to rely on worker power as a response to bosses delaying tactics.

### Survival of strong democratic shop floor organisations

One unionist summed up the situation as follows: "Certain basic concessions have to be won in order to ensure the survival of strong democratic shop floor organisation. These concessions have to be obtained by force from the bosses who have generally resisted the workers' demands for the right to hold general meetings within working hours, either to democratically elect or mandate their worker leadership. Much the same applied to the right of workers' leaders as a group to hold regular meetings during working hours. Workers have also demanded the right to be given time off to attend union meetings or to attend to other union business."

### Management responses differ

Management response has varied from open harassment to disguised methods of destruction. The BTR Sarmcol mass dismissal is one such case of open harassment. Employers who accept the presence of unions in their company also use disguised methods of preventing union growth in the company, by demanding that unions must sign recognition agreement before they receive basic union rights. A shop steward in one of the Barlow factories organised by MAWU put this most clearly: "All workers in our company joined MAWU in May 1986. Up until now management has refused to grant the union stop-order facilities. Management argues that this forms part of the long draft agreement that has been proposed for negotiations."

Most employers who claim not to be anti-union usually provide majority representative unions with basic rights such as shop steward recognition; which includes time-off for union business, access to the plant for union officials, stop-order facilities and the right to negotiate substantive issues. However most employers who also make the same claims argue that basic rights forms part of long procedural recognition agreements. This type of agreement includes procedures on industrial peace, strikes, retrenchments, dismissal, mediation, arbitration, shop steward elections and



- recognition agreements -

other related issues in addition to the basic union rights such as those mentioned above. Management attempts to bureaucratise industrial relations in the factory.

### Negotiate in "good faith"

Trade unions are expected to commit themselves to negotiating these long drafts. They are expected to negotiate rights that are already legislated in the various labour legislation. These rights have long being won by workers through struggle. They were forced into the statute books through worker power. Employers argue that trade unions must re-negotiate these rights in "good faith". This is a ploy to draw the union away from its concern with workers immediate problems: "Negotiating long recognition agreements is time consuming and doesn't address workers' day to day problems", said one official.

### Industrial peace

Employers argue that recognition agreements create "sound labour relations". Barlow Rand, the liberal conglomerate is a strong supporter of such views. A MAWU organiser dismissed this position as follows:

Recognition agreements are meant to regulate and contain conflict on the factory floor. However in reality this is not the case. The objective and material conditions between bosses and workers are such that workers do "breach" the agreement. This is not surprising. Under the capitalist system workers are inevitably in conflict with bosses. The solution is the resolution of the conflict between the two. Some unions have recognised this, hence their call for socialism.

### Problems with recognition agreements

Recognition agreements as used by management attempt to bog down unions by re-negotiating rights already won by workers. They do not meet workers' immediate needs. A MAWU organiser summed up the problem as follows:

Workers join the union to resolve their immediate problems. They want immediate defence against the hostile environment of the factory. They want wage increases, improvement in

working conditions, and dismissal of anti-union supervisors in extreme cases. They are not interested in mandating shop stewards and union officials to go and negotiate long agreements with employers. They are impatient to wait for dozens of meetings to take place while their material conditions don't change.

Another organiser who was active in the Germiston/Alrode area during 1984-85 related the following:

Quadrisection - a Barlow subsidiary - was organised in 1982. On the first meeting held with management agreement was reached on the following: stop-order facilities, shop steward recognition and access for union officials to the company premises. Problems started when workers demanded wages. Management argued that a full recognition agreement must be negotiated and signed before workers can demand wage increases. This was seen as an attempt to take away rights already won by workers. On the stop-order clause management wanted members to give short-notice, that is one day, if they wanted to resign from MAWU. In the past members were supposed to give four weeks notice. This enables shop stewards to investigate the motive behind members resignation. On the question of union access to company premises, management was now proposing that organisers should inform management about the intended visit prior to the date of that visit. Reasons should also be stated as to why the visit was made. The established practice was that officials came in anytime without prior notification to management. Workers response to this change and the refusal by management to negotiate wages was a ban on overtime followed by a go-slow. Placard demonstrations were also held.

When a shop steward seminar was held in 1985 for East Rand shop stewards, management was asked to release shop stewards, but refused. Afterwards they agreed on the basis that the shop stewards would not be paid for the time spent at the seminar. Workers rejected this offer and decided that all members of MAWU should attend the seminars on unpaid leave. The decision was taken in the morning of the first day of the seminar. In the afternoon all members (60 workers out of a total of 70 workers) clocked-off and went to the seminar. During the afternoon management phoned the union offices requesting that workers return to work and that dis-



## - recognition agreements -

cussion on their grievances commence. Workers agreed to go back to to work the following day. During the negotiations which took place after the seminar, management offered two days paid leave. There was a deadlock, and MAWU declared a dispute with the Metal Industrial Council on the basis that the company refuses to negotiate wages and paid leave for shop steward training. The outcome of the negotiations at the Industrial Council was a victory for workers. The company agreed to negotiate wages. The senior shop steward was granted twenty-four days leave for union business, ten of which were paid. Other shop-stewards were granted three days paid leave.

### Trade unions strategies towards recognition agreements

Trade unions have responded differently to recognition agreements. Some have rejected long procedural agreements. An organiser in the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) said, "We don't allow ourselves to ignore worker demands. Priorities in recognition agreements should be basic rights like stop-order facilities, shop steward recognition, right to negotiate substantive issues and access for union officials to company premises. In cases where management refuses to grant these rights, workers are to decide what action to take to gain those rights."

Other trade unions have agreed to negotiate recognition agreements for various reasons depending on their specific industry. CCAWUSA (Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union) for example, believes if possible one should negotiate recognition agreements that can stand on their own, and address as many of the problems workers are experiencing. The union negotiator on agreements said that over the last few years they had found that due to the increasing number of workers who wanted recognition agreements, but due to the fact that they have organised a huge number of large retail companies, and there is no centralised bargaining structure in the industry, it is not appropriate to negotiate full recognition procedural agreements. According to the CCAWUSA official it is simply too time consuming. It is too much of a drain on union resources. He believes the solution is to negotiate interim agreements which include only basic rights; but he said that to gain these rights in CCAWUSA initially it took widespread strikes some four to five years ago. Management did not want to hear about shop stewards, rights to negotiate wages and union recognition, and it took worker power to break through that barrier in large companies

in the retail trade.

MAWU has recently adopted a different strategy. The union used to negotiate recognition agreements at plant-level. Both interim and long procedural agreements were negotiated depending on the company in question. The union has now included basic union rights at the industrial council negotiations for 1987. MAWU demands that a union which has proved that it has enrolled a significant number of members in a plant should be granted the following:

- (i) Reasonable access to the company premises for the purpose of meeting with shop stewards, members and management.
- (ii) Majority representative unions should be entitled to hold elections for shop stewards to represent the union members in constituencies which shall be agreed without undue delay between the union and the management, and that the company should recognise these shop stewards as representatives of union members. Shop stewards should have the right to raise with management any issue of mutual interest.
- (iii) Any union party to the National Industrial Council for the Metal Industry (NICISEMI) which has enrolled a significant number of members in a plant should be granted stop-order facilities by the company without delay.

It remains to be seen how the employer, that is SEIFSA, will respond to these demands.

#### Why do employers delay recognition?

Control over labour is the primary concern for bosses. Discipline, non-interference in the labour process (shop stewards attending union seminars) and an acceptance of the exploitative factory system by workers is enforced by management through foremen and supervisors. Recognition agreements have previously been successful in establishing the presence of unions, and management control has been one of the main targets of the unions. Basic union rights have facilitated workers' organisation and helped to consolidate structures on the factory floor. Managements are now delaying granting these rights. What has previously been a strategy by unions to facilitate organisation in the factories is now used by management to delay that process.

(Jabu Matiko, April 1987)



# Racism sparks postal strike

Racist practices and poor labour relations in the postal sector has sparked a strike by more than 8,000 workers in the Witwatersrand area. This brings the total number of public sector workers presently on strike, including members of the South African Railways and Harbours Workers Union (SARHWU), to approximately 30,000.

It is the first time that worker action has threatened the vital transport and telecommunications sectors. The present strike, which has stopped all postal services to Soweto and has affected areas around Johannesburg is clearly viewed with growing concern by the state and the private sector. According to Vusi Khumalo, president of the postal workers union, the vital underground conveyor belt linking the post office to the outside world has also been affected. In response the post office has brought in a number of scabs, some allegedly recruited from as far away as Cape Town, in order to keep postal services moving. The movement of postal traffic is also being hampered by the present SATS strike.

The strike started on April 2 at all Soweto post offices after the Regional Director, Mr Olmesdahl, refused to discuss a number of worker grievances. According to the Post Office and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA) the Regional Director always walks out of meetings with the union and is never available to resolve grievances. Management has displayed an "arrogant attitude" towards the workers and their representatives ever since the launch of POTWA in September last year. This has been the case even though POTWA is officially recognised by the Post Office. Worker anger exploded when management unilaterally decided to stop providing transport to black workers on the basis that it was "too expensive". As a result of this all 4,000 workers at the Soweto post offices immediately stopped work. A number of grievances were presented, including the central demand that all racist structures and practices at the post office be stopped.

By April 8 the strike had spread from Soweto to Lenasia, Johannesburg, Randburg, Rosebank, Crown Mines, and a number of vital engineering yards including Bitcon and Power Park. POTWA reported that all phases of work were being affected as drivers, clerical staff, technicians, messengers, and the majority of manual labourers (eg, workers involved in cable laying) had joined. On the same

day a further 1,000 workers at the large Jeppe Street Post Office joined the strike and were subsequently locked out by management. Workers who were forced to congregate outside feared that this would be used as an excuse to detain them. POTWA shop stewards then led a march to COSATU House. Management also tried to address workers at Orlando, arguing that a common list of grievances had not been forwarded and that there were differing demands at the various post offices. The union viewed this as an attempt to bypass having to deal with them. There was a heavy police presence at all the yards. At the time the union estimated the number of workers on strike to have risen to about 7,000, yet management issued statements to the press on the same day saying that no more than 1,000 workers were involved.

### Grievances

According to Vusi Khumalo racial inequality lies at the heart of worker grievances in the public sector. Racist attitudes and practices have come to influence labour relations in a significant way. High on the list of worker grievances is the preferential treatment given to colleagues from the other "racial" groups. Racial groups are given separate training facilities, with better promotional prospects for members from the other racial groups. There are also separate facilities: in a long list of demands calling for the abolition of "local apartheid structures", the union listed separate toilets, canteen facilities, segregated counters, access to telephones, and unequal allocation of duties as some of these. Black workers are transported in open trucks when going to work whilst members of the other racial groups are provided with combis. The strike arose when management wanted to take away even this degrading form of transport. There is also the problem of paternalistic attitudes towards black workers. POTWA reports that young white employees often send black workers much older than themselves on errands to buy food or cigarettes.

The union highlighted a number of other grievances. There is absolutely no transport for members working late at night; workers are not given time-off and often have to bribe supervisors for such concessions. A call for three months paid maternity leave for women workers was also made. Transfers emerged as a major problem: the post office often discriminates against black workers by transferring them to remote regions away from their families whilst no housing or other amenities are provided. Whites on the other hand are provided with all the necessities that go along



- postal strike -

with such transfers. According to the union transfers are now also being used in an attempt to smash POTWA. The case of temporary and casual workers, increasingly becoming a feature in the public sector, was also highlighted. These workers, about 50% of the labour force, are designated as "temporary" even though many work for years at the post office. They are not entitled to pension benefits, there is no medical aid, and there are no stop-order facilities for such workers as they are simply paid "over the counter". They may be retrenched easily as occurred recently in Bethal and Standerton.

### Bargaining structures

Postal and telecommunications workers, like many of their colleagues in the public sector (eg. civil service, SATS, health and forestry workers) are excluded from labour relations provisions under the Labour Relations Act. This denies fundamental workers rights, such as access to the Industrial Court and the right to strike, to such workers. In addition bargaining structures within the public sector are highly fragmented. There is a complex bureaucratic hierarchy and the centralisation of decision-making functions in the Commission for Administration. This Commission decides broadly on personnel matters; it determines the Public Servants Code of Conduct. Recommendations based on annual estimates are also made around the grading scheme and the wage structure. These are usually racially based. Grievance procedures, and conditions of service not resolved at departmental level, may also be determined by the Commission. The power to implement all decisions finally rests with the relevant government Minister, who issues regulations governing various aspects of labour relations.

In the case of postal workers legislation governing labour relations is also found in the Post Office Service Act No 66 of 1974 (the Act). In terms of this Act, workers in this sector are allowed to form staff associations, usually racially based, which may then bargain further around conditions of service with the relevant Staff Relations Council. All proposals made at the Council are taken to the highest local authority, the Staff Management Board which must authorise any decision and forward it to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications for final approval. Bargaining around wages is severely constrained as this has usually already been determined by the annual budget. Insofar as bargaining around wages is concerned this would therefore usually revolve around the annual percentage increases.

Grade and racial determinations of salaries are not challenged. There is likely to be greater flexibility around bargaining around related issues, such as remuneration rates for overtime, rates of travelling and subsistence allowances, pension benefits, disciplinary proceedings, and so on. These must still however be authorised by the Staff Management Board and approved by the Minister. The Postmaster General then sends all such directives to the various departments.

According to POTWA the present Staff Relations Council is dominated by four conservative "white" associations who have a very close alliance with management. Two additional associations, one for "Coloured" and another for "Indian" workers also sit on the Council. Voting rights on this body are not determined by membership as each association is simply allocated one vote. Even a combined vote by the three black associations would still result in their being outnumbered 12 to 3 (due to management votes). This makes it almost impossible to win any improvements opposed by management. POTWA sees unity of the three associations as essential if the present bargaining framework is to be challenged. The Act also makes it more difficult to effectively challenge management in that section 47 gives the Minister additional powers to issue a regulation regarding the settlement of any dispute. In terms of this provision the Minister may issue a regulation regarding forfeiture of employment, transfers, promotions, dismissals, and all privileges in respect of leave of absence from work without valid reason. The Minister clearly has ultimate authority to override the outcome of any so-called bargaining at local level. Workers who decide to stay away from work without "valid reason" may also be charged with misconduct (section 23 of the Act). Any may, after disciplinary hearings (section 17), be discharged from duty. The Postmaster General may also be able to dismiss a group of workers under this charge if a Ministerial regulation empowering him to do so is issued.

### Conditions in the postal sector

Recent calls by the private sector to decrease the size of the state sector have taken hold in the postal and telecommunications sector. Attempts are being made to switch to private provision of goods and services and to review the present system of "cross-subsidisation". This programme has acquired a particular sense of urgency recently as the postal sector came out with an operating deficit of R107,6 million in the 1985/6 financial year.



- postal strike -

Pressure on foreign loan sources, due to disinvestment, has also required that operating costs be decreased to a minimum. The post office reports that the total amount of foreign loans prior to the "debt-freeze" in 1985 amounted to R231,348 million. As a result the post office is increasingly looking to the domestic market for continued financing. At the same time however the change-over to computer based technology has necessitated increased spending in almost every sphere. New telephone exchange centres have been built, new engineering yards and depots are being constructed, data transmission services and telephone traffic has increased. The construction of underground cable networks, installation of microwave towers and the construction of access roads have all increased. As a result the present policy is to focus attention particularly on labour requirements.

The post office is presently engaged in a programme of freezing staff requirements and implementing minimal annual salary increases. This has resulted in the loss of technical and engineering staff to the private sector, and their increasing replacement by black workers who have acquired training on the job. These workers are expected to carry out the same functions at lower wage rates. The increased work is carried out with the same amount of workers. The postal services, mail collection, processing of letters, and mail delivery have come in for concerted attack as these are also the most labour intensive sections. In the big cities, like Johannesburg, mail processing is now partly mechanised, but this is not the case in smaller centres. The attempt to remove transportation for black workers in this area is clearly part of the general programme to reduce costs.

At the same time however the post office is not prepared to increase wages for the black workers. POTWA estimates the wages to be as low as R200 per month for some workers. The money wasted on separate facilities, postal services for separate "homeland" authorities, lavish pension and retirement schemes, housing subsidies for white workers provides the other side of the picture.

### Present events

Postal and telecommunications workers have now decided to use their power at the workplace to challenge this system. It is also becoming clear that an extension of the strike beyond the Witwatersrand area may become necessary if management is to be effectively challenged. Talks between the union and management, scheduled for

April 15 failed to take place after management's refusal to meet two of the preconditions set by the workers. Workers demanded that two detained workers, allegedly held by post office officials and subsequently handed over to the police be released. POTWA argues that since the post office played a major role in the workers' detention they must now secure their release. The union also demanded that scabs brought in to the underground cable section be removed before talks could proceed.

Management on the other hand issued a statement indicating that all workers on strike are to forfeit their salaries forthwith. There has as yet been no indication that dismissal of the striking workers is being contemplated. A department spokesperson told the press that, "Post office management's door remains open for negotiations with POTWA, although it is unclear when such discussion will take place". In the meantime the post office has increased the numbers of workers they estimate to be on strike to 4,800.

At the time of writing the union indicated that a national shop stewards council would be held to strategise and discuss events thus far. POTWA presently claims a total membership of 15,000 in 17 regions around the country. There is a potential membership of 30,000 in the postal and telecommunications sector. The union also says that as a direct result of the strike new members have signed up with the union at the rate of 100 a day.

On April 20 management issued a statement indicating their willingness to secure the release of the two POTWA members and to appoint a "neutral" chairperson in mediation talks between the union and management. POTWA responded by saying that there was no need for a neutral chairperson and that since the major precondition for talks had been met they would begin talks with management. The union reports that talks were subsequently held on the 21st but that these broke down again when workers and officials discovered late in the talks that only one worker had been released and that the other worker had been sentenced to two years jail, with a further year suspended, on "intimidation" charges. This was viewed as an indication of lack of "good faith" on managements' side as the union had specifically demanded that both workers be released. A rally held at Soweto's Regina Mundi church on April 27 saw more than 5,000 workers demanding that something be done about the sentenced worker before talks could proceed. The union reported that lawyers were working on the issue. The meeting resolved that negotiations with management be continued provided:



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- \* The worker's job be kept open
- \* Payment be made for the period in prison
- \* All benefits due to post-office workers, (eg parity or promotions) be extended to him.

The union also reported that since prior events had indicated that management could no longer be trusted, a written statement undertaking to do the above be given by Mr Olmesdahl. POTWA now says that negotiations will resume as soon as management indicates some willingness to meet the new conditions. "The union is of the view that these new preconditions for talks are in fact quite light and could easily be met by management", says Khumalo.

Promises by the post office to institute parity in payment; equal pay for equal work, as from the end of April are also clearly being watched by the union. Should this promise be kept management's willingness to resolve the present crisis in the postal sector would be shown. In the interim workers have resolved not to return to their workplaces until Thursday April 30. A support committee has also been set up. At present the strike remains confined to the Witwatersrand area although postal workers in East London have reportedly also stopped work because of similar grievances.

### Sources

Interview with Vusi Khumalo, 8.4.87 and 16.4.87; various press reports; Annual Report of the Postmaster General 1985/6.

(Coletane Markham, April 1987)

# Things go slower at Coke

The March 20 go-slow by coke workers marked a further step in worker unity in action across union lines in the battle against Coke bosses, just as they prepare to sell their 30% remaining shares in South Africa. Workers involved were from South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and Food, Beverage Workers Union (FBWU). Plants affected by the go-slow were Benrose (650 workers), Bedfordview (800), Clayville (350), Devland (600), Pretoria (800) and Lea Glen (100).

The demand by workers at Amalgamated Beverage Industries (ABI) to be paid the 100 year centenary bonus paid to Amalgamated Beverage Canning (ABC) raised questions on the relationship of both companies to Coke Export Corporation. South African Breweries presently has the majority of shares in ABI. According to workers in ABI factories, "Management has always kept the question of who owns what confidential, but sometimes tricked workers. In 1976 workers were told that Coke Export Corporation was taking over 87% shares of Schweppes and that both Schweppes and South African Breweries (SAB) were owning minority shares. Later on management said SAB was owning 55%, Coke Export 30% and Schweppes 15% of shares. In 1985 workers learnt that SAB was going to control ABI completely, but employment conditions would remain the same for workers." (1)

The newly-formed Coke Workers Co-ordinating Committee faces a difficult task. ABI and ABC are presently owned by different companies. The former is owned by SAB and the latter by National Breweries Services. Workers don't think Coke Export Corporation has withdrawn from South Africa, instead they view the announcement of Coke selling its remaining 30% shares as a cosmetic change. According to Henry Lechataba, a vice-chairman of the Food Beverage Workers Union for the Transvaal and a chairman of the Shop steward Committee in Benrose ABI plant, "The Coke Workers Co-ordinating Committee envisages to meet the Coke Export Corporation international personnel manager, Mr Michael Samoroa."

## Coke 100 year anniversary

During late 1986 the Coke 100 year centenary was celebrated. Workers in ABI and ABC factories claim that they were treated dif-



- coke go-slow -

ferently during the celebrations. At the Bedfordview plant (ABI) workers were given certificates, written messages of thanks for having contributed to the growth of Coke Export Corporation. In Devland (ABI) each worker got one tea mug engraved with "Coke hundred years". At Clayville and Benrose (both ABI plants) workers were offered T-shirts printed "Coca Cola hundred years". The Wadeville (ABC plant) workers were offered 6 weeks pay as a centenary bonus.

Workers in ABI plants were ignorant about the ABC offer to workers until they got news from their SAAWU counterparts. Under these circumstances the Coke Workers Co-ordinating Committee was established. At a meeting of all Coke workers it was decided that the bonus issue should be raised with ABI management. ABI shop stewards in all companies presented their demands to management. The first meeting bore no fruit. Management claimed that the bonus issue was Coke Export Corporation's responsibility and not ABI's. Workers argued that ABI was Coke's "South African front", has taken over Coke's problems in South Africa and therefore must pay the bonus given to other Coke workers during the 100 year centenary celebrations. Workers justified their position by stating that ABI was party to the 100 year centenary celebrations.

On March 21 workers in all ABI plants decided to go on a go-slow if ABI was not prepared to pay the bonus. After two days ABI management responded by demanding that workers resume normal working procedures and that negotiations should commence on the bonus demand. At this meeting management offered 2 weeks pay. Workers rejected this offer and eventually management offered 4 weeks pay which was accepted by workers.

### Selling shares

ABI is presently selling R10-million worth of shares. The company hopes to bring in black businessmen to buy shares. Peter Lloyd, the chairman of ABI said that the offer "would allow many small businessmen who may never have had the chance to obtain shares in a company, to own a part of a company whose products they sell. Nothing on this scale has been tried in this country before." Is this an attempt to avoid boycott of ABI commodities by township businessmen?

In addition to the offer made to the black businessmen, ABI also plans to sell R1-m worth of its shares to its 38,000 employees.

Unions have not responded to this offer, but Food, Beverage Workers Union has warned the black businessmen's organisation, NAFSOC, and the Get-ahead Foundation against buying or helping black businessmen to buy Coke shares. When asked to put NAFSOC's position on the issue (ie. selling of shares to black businessmen by ABI), the public relations officer of NAFSOC, Mr Mokgoko expressed ignorance about the warning given to NAFSOC by Food, Beverage Workers Union. However he pointed out that NAFSOC was pursuing the question of buying shares in ABI. He also expressed dissatisfaction about the percentage of shares sold by ABI. He felt they were not enough to "give the black community a substantial participation in shareholding. Enough shares will place blacks in a strong position in the economy." According to Mr Mokgoko suggestions have been presented to ABI to increase shareholding for blacks. On the question of Food, Beverage Workers Union, Mr Mokgoko felt stronger ties should be built between themselves and the union.

He justified this by stating that, "When the economy deepens, there will obviously be conflicts, and NAFSOC and trade unions which are also concerned with the advancement of the black community should contact each other in this regard." What conflict Mr Mokgoko is referring to is unclear, but if it is class conflict, it remains to be seen how the contact between NAFSOC and trade unions (if they agreed to this contact) will resolve the conflict. Meanwhile the former head of Coke South Africa operations, Fred Meyer, sees the situation as follows, "The arrangement was in line with the company's stated intention to use its former investments in South Africa as far as possible to create multi-racial participation in the country's soft drink industry." Fred Meyer's suggested solution is to create a multi-racial employer class, and of course the objective being to accumulate profits at the expense of the workers.

(Jabu Matiko, April 1987)

### References

1. Interview with Henry Lechaba, Food and Beverage Workers Union shop-steward.



# Advances in maternity agreements

The recent maternity agreement between the metal unions and the metal employers federation (SEIFSA) has taken the struggle for national maternity protection a major step forward. (see SALB 12.3) COSATU has resolved to deepen this victory by including the demand for six months paid maternity as part of the national demands in the Living Wage Campaign.

These victories notwithstanding, it is nevertheless necessary that the struggle for maternity protection not be abstracted from the need for broader and more comprehensive protective measures for working women. Related and equally important demands still have to be generalised in union agreements with employers. In addition maternity protection must be situated within the need for broader changes in the sexual division of labour both at work and at home.

Whereas maternity rights as presently formulated do address the central problem for most working women, that of adequate financial compensation and job security, these rights nevertheless do not begin to challenge the segmentation of work categories along sex lines, or alleviate the unbearable burden of the "double shift" for example. Unions have recognised these weaknesses: the March/April edition of Metal Worker points out that, "Women still suffer poorer job opportunities, unequal pay for similar work, segregation into poorly paid jobs, jobs like cleaning and catering, and widespread sexual harassment - not only by management but also by male colleagues". COSATU's call for national maternity rights opens the space for wider mobilisation around related issues.

## Maternity legislation

According to Barbara Klugman (SALB 9.3) the state of protective legislation in South Africa historically reflects the accepted ideology of women as mothers, but fails to recognise their growing importance in the productive sphere. Protective rules, up until the passing of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No 3 of 1983, such as the ban on nightwork for women, and the statutory obligation for at least one month off prior to giving birth were designed to protect the role of motherhood. Thus whereas the law explicitly recognised the right of motherhood, the right of working women to become mothers in the first place was denied. The lack of

maternity rights at work made pregnancy a threat to continued employment. Employers would simply fire women who became pregnant, or would re-employ them at a lower status. This situation becomes particularly important in South Africa where, as Klugman argues, "the base line for our understanding ... is the recognition of the importance of employment for both married and single women. Research on black families has shown that women are often the sole breadwinners in the household. This situation has worsened in the light of the present economic crisis, as working class families, both men and women, feel immense pressure to maintain employment. Pregnant women have resorted to desperate measures such as binding their stomachs, or taking only a few days "sick leave" in order to give birth. Many have resorted to back-street abortions, often resulting in death or lifetime sterilization, in order to keep their jobs. The unions challenge, fighting to ensure job security, therefore goes a long way towards alleviating this problem."

Nevertheless a feature of the present economic crisis has also been the increasing resort to retrenchment, thus resulting in loss of employment altogether. Insofar as maternity rights have been gained at the shop floor these protect only those who are already employed. Two major problems still remain. Firstly the continued discrimination by employers against pregnant job applicants. Secondly the problem of increasing unemployment. Women are often the first to be retrenched; statistics show that there are nearly three unemployed women for every unemployed male. The problem of growing unemployment necessitates a major challenge to existing maternity legislation.

#### UIF

At present state provision for pregnant women falls under the Unemployment Insurance Fund. According to this fund women may receive 45% of normal earning for a maximum period of 18 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth of the baby. In order to qualify women must have contributed to the fund for at least 18 weeks during the 52 weeks (ie: one year) immediately preceding the expected date of confinement or where application is made on or after the date of birth, the date of birth, as the case may be. Women may claim one weeks benefit for every six weeks of employment, meaning that she must have worked for at least three years in order to receive the full 26 weeks benefit. The present provisions thus discriminate particularly against those who are unemployed, as they would be disqualified if no contributions in the

- maternity -

past year had been made. A women who was retrenched in 1985 and who then falls pregnant in 1986/7 having been unemployed throughout that time would not be able to claim.

There is also a time limit on when an application for UIF may be lodged, as benefits are forfeited if applications are made after 8 weeks after the date of birth of the baby. Women who are unaware of this, or have difficulty filling in the relevant claim forms will not receive their benefits at all. According to the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) the problem is worsened by employers who do not hand over an employees record card when she goes on confinement, as payment of UIF is delayed until the card is produced. The IAS claims that women who lose jobs permanently due to pregnancy are also discriminated against. They may not then claim for general UIF benefits as the Department of Manpower argues that they have already claimed for maternity benefits under the fund. Provisions for "extension benefits" which are available to workers claiming UIF because of hardship suffered are also not available under the maternity scheme.

The UIF system is clearly totally unreliable. Payment under the scheme in practice is usually only made from the date on which leave was taken, such that most women do not even receive the full 26 weeks payment. The amount of payment offered is also inadequate, as this is precisely the time when women need more not less money. The system is also marred by bureaucratic inefficiencies. IAS reports that whereas payment normally takes between four to six weeks after applications are lodged, there are cases of women who have waited months to receive payment. This is corroborated by metal workers interviewed who claimed that in one case a women waited eight months after the birth of the baby before she received any money.

The fact that women may only claim for eight weeks after birth also forces women back to work early, thereby exposing babies to a whole range of illnesses which arise due to lack of breastfeeding (notably gastro-enteritis). Women who suffer complications during birth are afraid to extend the period taken off after birth because of fear of losing their jobs. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the present system however is the fact that it is only available to a select few. The unemployed, agricultural workers, domestics and casual workers, all the areas where there is the greatest concentration of female labour are excluded. IAS reports that more recently the situation has worsened as many women who are citizens



of the so-called "independent states", Transkei, Venda, and Bophuthatswana may no longer claim under the South African scheme. This has caused confusion and complications, as many employers do not register such employees with the relevant homeland authorities.

In 1979 the Wiehahn Commission, realising the growing importance of women in the economy recommended an extension of pre-natal leave, that re-employment be guaranteed within a certain time period, and an increase in UIF payments to 60% of normal earnings. This was rejected by the state on the basis that reports of "undue hardship" under the present system had never been received. The state's refusal to legislate maternity protection, according to Klugman, is "rationalised in terms of production losses and fails to give serious credibility to the most critical needs of working mothers". As a result unions have been forced to define the needs of their workers and to fight to achieve these.

### Union challenge

Unions have challenged the present system in a number of respects. In 1984 CCAWUSA won a major breakthrough at OK Bazaars where 12 months leave, without pay, for women on confinement was won. This agreement was improved in a later agreement in 1985 at Metro Cash and Carry where 12 months leave with guaranteed re-employment was won: seven of these would be paid at 33% of the workers salary. Together with UIF payments this amounted to 78% of the woman's salary for six months and a further month at 33%. The agreement also allowed for three days paternity leave after the birth of the baby, and R100 free baby goods from any Metro store. There was also a comprehensive health and safety section, as well as a clause preventing refusal of job applications by pregnant women.

Between 1985 and 1986 the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) won a number of agreements at individual companies. A huge campaign in 1986 saw twenty agreements in the Transvaal area alone. Of these the most far-reaching is that with Rolfes, where six-and-a-half months leave at full pay is available. In total CWIU now has maternity agreements at 32 factories, of which 18 are paying full leave. There are also health safeguards at these factories, and the right to attend ante-natal clinics at 12. Paternity leave of between 2 and 3 days is available at 20 factories.

Sweet Food and Allied Workers, now part of Food and Allied (FAWU) won three months leave at full pay at Simba Chips. The Paper Wood

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and Allied Workers Union (PWAU) won 25% of normal earnings at Pascellent. More recently National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) made a major breakthrough at the BMW plant in Rosslyn, where proposals that the company build a creche on the premises for working women have now been accepted. The creche will cater for toddlers and pre-school children. According to NAAWU the creche is to be subsidised by the company, but will be totally controlled by the workers. NAAWU has already asked members of the Health and Information Centre (HIC) to assist in the training of pre-school teachers.

The latest victory by Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) is significant in that maternity rights have been extended across an entire industry for the first time. This alleviates the burden on resources and time needed to struggle on a company by company basis. Nevertheless a number of problems still remain.

## Health and safety

Metal workers interviewed after the latest maternity agreement expressed dismay at the absence of health and safety clauses in the agreement with SEIFSA. Women explained that they were pleased with the provision for leave, but highlighted the fact that they are often employed in areas which are dangerous or unsafe for pregnant women. One woman explained that she worked in the printing section of her factory. They often work with dye and chemicals which are dangerous to a normal person but are even more dangerous in the case of pregnancy. "We need to be transferred to less dangerous areas of work in these cases", she said. Another worker agreed, "we are required to lift heavy articles or work on welding machines which presents a major problem in the event of pregnancy". In the retail industry women are often moved to the packaging section to remove them from the "public eye". Yet the work done here is particularly unsafe for pregnant women. Health and safety clauses are therefore important in any maternity agreement.

## Child care

The problem of lack of breastfeeding has often been highlighted. Workers argued that the way to resolve this problem would be to struggle for child-care facilities at the workplace. Insofar as this is not possible management must subsidise the establishment of child care centres in the townships. Working mothers also need the right to take paid leave after the birth of the baby in order

to attend clinics or have regular check-ups. At present the situation is very unequal, with some employers granting such rights and others deducting pay or demanding a doctors certificate from the worker. This results in workers being afraid to take time-off in order to care for their babies. It is also important to guard against employers exploiting concern for health and safety to exclude women from work categories which could easily be done by them if certain changes were implemented.

### Flexibility

Many workers expressed preference for greater time-off after the birth of the baby. This would enable greater care to be taken of the new born baby. The present UIF system discourages this. The need is for greater flexibility with each individual worker deciding which would best suit her according to her needs.

### Qualifying clauses

Employers often stipulate qualifying clauses in their agreements with unions. In the metal agreement the qualifying period is two years contribution to the Sick Pay Fund, and a maximum of two claims per woman. The CCAWUSA agreement with Metro stipulates a qualifying period of one months employment. This raises the question of just what a "reasonable" qualifying period ought to be. Metal workers complained about the unnecessarily long period needed in order to qualify. In addition the maximum of two claims per woman was seen as another attempt by management to force family planning onto the workers. Any campaign for national maternity rights would have to address this problem.

### Casualisation

Employers often pay maternity benefits under established funds, such as the Sick Pay Fund, or in the absence of this the UIF scheme. Recently however the numbers of women taken on on a "casual" basis have increased dramatically. Such workers are often excluded from such schemes. The growing numbers of women employed in the Johannesburg municipality on this basis is just one example. Maternity agreements must include such workers. Unions have fought to include women in the "homelands" in maternity agreements, and the position of casual and temporary workers must also be explicitly stated. It is important that the LIFO principle which discriminates particularly against casual and temporary workers must



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not be used by employers to escape their commitment to maternity benefits.

### Paternity rights

Caring for children should not only be a woman's responsibility. If one considers that the state of maternity rights at any specific point in time is an important factor influencing women's participation in the labour force, then the need for paternity leave is highlighted. The fact that women have historically carried the responsibility for reproducing the labour force has given employers the excuse to discriminate against them at the workplace. It is argued that women are "unreliable" workers, hence they are given the worst, low paying jobs. The responsibility for child-care must be shared. Fathers are therefore entitled to increased paternity leave. In some countries, such as Sweden, men are entitled to six months paternity leave after the birth of the baby.

### State responsibilities

MAWU reports that many employers refuse to pay women going on confinement because they argue that that is the responsibility of the government. The inadequacies of the UIF scheme have however already been pointed out. Yet national administration, the right for maternity protection and related protection on a national basis is clearly desirable. The inclusion of this as a national demand in the Living Wage Campaign clearly indicates this. Nevertheless the issue is not simple, the disparity in payment for example, the principle of payment as a percentage of wages earned is one issue which could be addressed at national level. This system discriminates against lowly paid workers. There is no logic in paying greater amounts of benefits to women in the higher earning brackets as these are not the women who necessarily need the greatest amount of money. The present system of company by company bargaining exacerbates such inequalities across regions and industries. And yet there is also a sense in which national agreements cannot address the most immediate needs of workers at specific factories and in particular localities. Co-ordination of the national campaign will also have to take account of specific plant level demands.

(Coletane Markham, April 1987)

# Address by Comrade Jay Naidoo\*

Comrades

The Kinross Disaster last year brought home to the oppressed and exploited the stark reality that the bosses will always place profits before lives of workers. 177 miners suffocated on the poisonous gases that were given off when the polyurethane that lines the walls of the shafts caught fire. 235 were seriously injured. Gencor in order to reduce costs used polyurethane, a substance that has been banned in many countries.

Every day hundreds of you the worker leaders face the situation where workers are maimed and killed. The statistics are mind-boggling. Every year:

- \* more than 2,000 workers are killed
- \* 30,000 are seriously injured
- \* 6 workers disabled each day
- \* it has been estimated that 100,000 hands, 50,000 feet and 40,000 eyes are seriously injured each year.

## Apartheid, capitalism and health and safety

Apartheid is one of the most brutal forms of capitalism in the world. The bosses and apartheid regime have built and will defend the cheap labour system. The various apartheid laws from migrant labour, the hostel system to the denial of political rights to the oppressed majority are designed to make it easier for the bosses and their government to exploit the working class.

The main feature of this system is the widespread poverty. This poverty has a very direct effect on the health of millions of our people. Many of our illnesses and accidents in the workplace can be traced back to the profit system of the bosses.

Today we meet here to understand and learn and plan how to advance the struggle for health and safety in the workplace, but in our minds we know that the problems we face can only be removed by a fundamental restructuring of the economy that will ensure that the

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\* given to the health and safety day organised by the Health Information Centre and the Industrial Aid Society, 28.3.87.

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wealth we produce is democratically controlled. It is only, by placing workers' lives and needs before profits that we can ensure a safe working environment.

### Health and safety on COSATU's agenda

COSATU would like to congratulate HIC and the IAS for initiating this day of activity around health and safety. As we know this year COSATU is campaigning for a living wage. An integral part of that campaign is to win more control over our lives both in the workplace and in society as a whole. The struggle for health and safety protection is part of that battle. We have demanded the right to:

- \* elect safety committees that represent our true interests.
- \* to have full-time health and safety shop stewards.
- \* to inspect the workplace on a regular basis.
- \* to have access to all information on machinery and chemicals.
- \* to have proper education and training.
- \* to refuse to do dangerous work.
- \* to have better safety clothing and a working environment that the bosses must negotiate with us.
- \* to be directly involved in the planning and control of all health facilities in the workplace.
- \* to sue the state and the bosses for negligence.
- \* to increased workmens compensation and this Act to be extended to include all workers including domestics.

We believe by fighting and winning these demands we can go a long way in defending the rights of workers.

### Role of service organisations

COSATU recognises the role that the democratic service organisations are playing in building the labour movement in South Africa. It is important for us to make the following points:

- \* A service organisation cannot exist external to the mass movement it serves. Service organisations to a large extent still remain groups of in most cases committed individuals mainly intellectuals. In the pressured environment that our worker leadership organise under you need always guard against the tendency to overtake the organisation in the issues you wish to take up. It may seem tedious but service organisations must always bear in mind that their role is to transfer the expertise and skills that they have to workers. The science of health and



safety needs to be translated into a style and language that workers understand - to go further than create a few experts.

- \* Service organisations are not in any direct way accountable or acting under the discipline of mass organisation. Yet the nature of the service you provide cannot be defined as politically neutral. For COSATU any group outside the labour movement that attempts to take on itself the role of a self-appointed judge in either a political or organisational way of our policies or practices is unacceptable. As a mass based and democratic organisation it is obvious that differences will exist within COSATU that will be dealt with in a disciplined way within the structures of COSATU. We very definitely do not require the strategic intervention of individuals or groups that may want to reduce everything to ideas that are very laudable but exist outside any mass organisation.
- \* We also see a proliferation of different service organisations which we view as counter-productive. COSATU has a very firm policy on one union per industry. This policy developed to enable workers to have the power of workers organised on a national basis and also to pool the resources that would equip them to advance the struggle against oppression and exploitation. We believe that this can also be applied across all sectors of the democratic movement. Service organisations need to begin discussing creation of more cohesive structures at a local, regional and national level that relate to our structures.
- \* COSATU will be shortly discussing the future relationship in a more structured way with service organisations. We believe that this process is necessary to enable that working class organisation is advanced and consolidated. We have already resolved to develop much greater resources within COSATU.

### Conclusion

The struggle for better health and safety cannot be separated from the struggle for a society that serves the needs of the majority. This is why millions of workers and youth have rejected the present system of capitalism and are looking at alternatives where their needs are paramount. However the campaign for better health and safety plays an important role in building the organisation and challenging the undemocratic control exercised over our lives by the bosses and their government.

# Berni Fanaroff on MAWU strategy

The second round of wage talks took place on April 2. The International Metalworkers Federation unions - MAWU included - put forward a proposal to alter the steep wage curve which exists in the industry and which they believe is due to racial discrimination. In the past the wages of unskilled and semi-skilled workers were much lower because they were not represented on the Industrial Council. The position has not improved greatly despite the more recent presence of unions representing unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There is still a big dip in the wage curve. The IMF proposal is that employers should be attacked on the question of wages in two ways: one by demanding that the wage curve be straightened out to be non-discriminatory, in other words to reduce the wage curve, and the other is to campaign for a living wage. In response SEIFSA, the employers' federation, made the following offer to begin to straighten out the wage curve:

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<u>Rate</u>	<u>New Increase</u>	<u>New Rate</u>
A	0	R6,41
AA	8C	R5,16
AA 6 Months	8C	R5,45
AB	10C	R4,94
B	4C	R4,76
C	0	R4,60
D	0	R4,48
DD	4C	R3,70
DDD	5C	R3,26
E	4C	R3,06
F	4C	R2,81
G	3C	R2,63
H	0	R2,52
I	0	R2,52

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The SALB interviewed MAWU National Organiser, Berni Fanaroff, about the wage talks and MAWU's wage strategy. (16.4.87)

SALB: In 1983 when MAWU decided to participate in the Industrial Council for the Metal Industry there were 500,000 workers in the industry, but only 100,000 were unionised in different unions. Are

there any changes in this regard?

Berni Fanaroff: There are two kinds of workers in the metal industry. There are what we call scheduled and non-scheduled workers. The scheduled workers are people who are in the production jobs, whose jobs are scheduled in the main agreement for the metal industry, and then there are non-production jobs like clerical, quality control, and cleaning and tea-making jobs which are not scheduled. So there are about 370,000 people in the industry and I reckon there is probably another 100,000 unscheduled. The number of scheduled workers has gone down from about 480,000 in 1982. In the last three years 110,000 jobs have been lost in the industry.

There have been two developments: one is that companies have been rationalising, and where people leave their jobs they have not been replaced. At the present time the retrenchments are easing off; towards the end of last year they were running at 2,000 per month just in the Transvaal region; but that's only scheduled workers. I am not quite sure about non-scheduled workers.

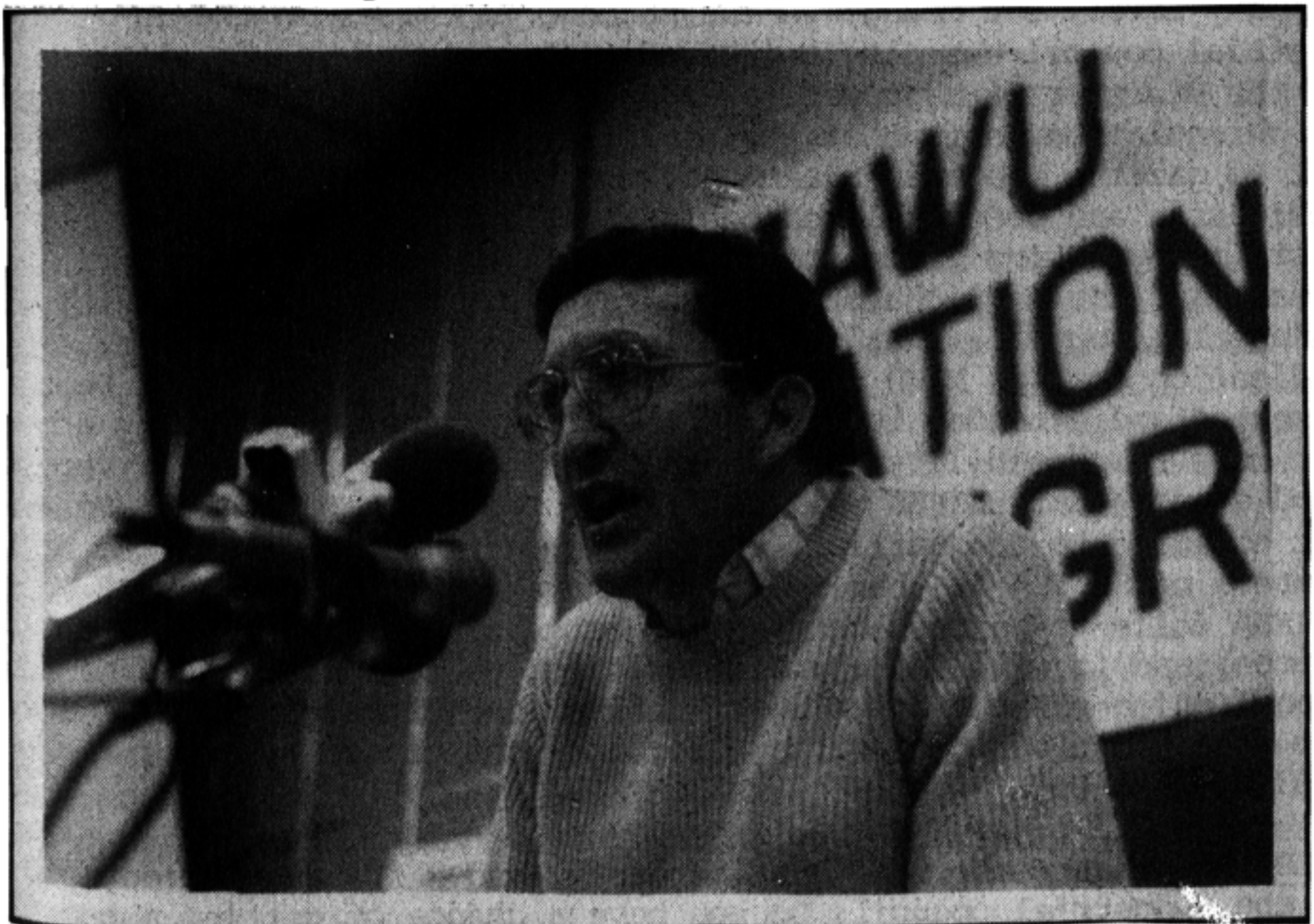


photo: Berni Fanaroff addresses the Annual Congress of MAWU, 1986



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SALB: Could you explain the problem MAWU faced in 1983 when the majority of metal workers were not unionised, whereas the industrial council agreement covered all workers irrespective of whether they belonged to unions or not?

Berni Fanaroff: The problem was easier in those days than it is now. Because we were a minority, we could simply put our demands in the council and not take the consequences. We could just demand what we liked and stick to the demands and not move. We knew that the other unions were going to sell out sooner or later, and we could afford just to take the hardline.

SALB: What is the situation now given the increased membership in MAWU. Does this have any effect on the industrial council wage negotiations?

Berni Fanaroff: Now the problem is we are the biggest union in the council and the employers recognise that, and they still side with the other unions, but it is becoming more and more difficult to do that, because we follow up our pressure at national level and at company level. But change in the balance of forces in the industrial council has also coincided with a change in the attitude of the Minister of Manpower towards industrial councils. The issue of deregulation means that the Minister is now looking for excuses not to gazette the main agreement, not to extend it to smaller businesses and decentralised businesses, and for some time he has just been granting exemptions to the main agreement to people in areas like Louis Trichardt and others, against the wishes of the industrial council. What's happening now is that the Minister is indicating that if MAWU does not sign the agreement it won't be gazetted and extended to non-parties. That means we now carry a lot more responsibility than in the past, because there is a very good chance that SEIFSA will fall to pieces if the agreement is not extended to non-parties. Then it benefits companies not to be members of SEIFSA in that they don't have to pay increases. If SEIFSA falls to pieces, centralised bargaining will also fall to pieces, and it will be very difficult for us to operate as a national union without any kind of centralised bargaining. So we are now in a position where we have to carry the council whereas in 1983 we used to do what we liked.

SALB: Now that membership has increased, and MAWU has a stronghold in the industrial council. Do you have a chance of getting support from other unions who sit on the council?

Berni Fanaroff: We do operate with the other IMF unions in putting demands. There is a fair amount of cooperation up to the point where we reach deadlock with management but then the individual unions must decide for themselves whether they are going to sign the agreement; but in particular, none of the other unions have supported us in industrial action and it seems unlikely, that they ever will. The IMF unions too, I can't imagine them supporting us in industrial action.

SALB: Has MAWU managed to put united workers demands to employers?

Berni Fanaroff: I think our demands must be widely supported because they originate from shop floor representatives, but to make sure that workers are fully involved chairmen of the factory shop steward committees attend the industrial council negotiations. Although they don't sit in the room where negotiations are taking place, the negotiating team - which is the NEC - gets mandates from them, and that is working quite well because our members know exactly what is going on, they are directing the process at all accounts. We also made sure this year that a pamphlet was issued giving a report of the negotiations.

SALB: One of the reasons for entering the industrial council was to face employers at all levels. Has the union managed so far to achieve this objective?

Berni Fanaroff: We became much more effective at the industrial level than we were. That's partly because of our experiences in running national campaigns and partly because the union has got bigger. When we first entered the council we had under 30,000 members, and we now have 65,000. As a result of our living wage campaign in 1986, we went from 37,000 to 60,000 by December 1986. We have developed the ability to face employers at national level; also one result has been that employers in a lot of companies wished to move to plant-level bargaining in order to get away from national bargaining. This was because when our campaigns are effective they get pressure from workers at plant-level. A lot of big employers and multi-nationals believe they can escape from industrial action by negotiating at plant-level. Last year employers offered a lot of big increases to workers at plant-level. But what was unusual is that these negotiations were initiated by employers to get away from bargaining at national level.

SALB: You are saying that most of the plant-level bargaining which

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took place during the 1986 national negotiations was successful. How do you explain the claim made by a MAWU pamphlet "Assessing the '86 wage campaign", that members got "impatient" with waiting for national negotiations, hence they agreed or forced employers into plant-level negotiations. Do you think members were impatient or simply did not understand the developments that were taking place at the council meetings.

Berni Fanaroff: People became impatient because the dispute dragged on for such a long time. We eventually dropped the dispute about September last year, which means the negotiations were going from March to September. People wanted to get more money as soon as possible.

I think workers have developed a factory consciousness. When I say impatient I mean because of that factory consciousness it becomes easier for them to move away from the national campaign and push their own employer for more increases.

SALB: How does the union view the relationship between national and plant level bargaining?

Berni Fanaroff: We view centralised bargaining as being the most important one, because it's a bargaining that brings all the metal workers together, and allows us to build the ability to mobilise nationally. With regard to factory level bargaining, this also has been important because it builds up factory structures and factory consciousness; trade union consciousness, at a very real level to workers. It is much less abstract to them than national level bargaining.

SALB: MAWU believes that the union can only be strong if members at each factory are well organised. What effect does the union participation in the industrial council have on this basic principle?

Berni Fanaroff: There are a lot of problems with our factory structures now, but I am not sure if that has a lot do with the industrial council. I think its more because we don't have enough organisers and too many factories. A lot of organisers are put in the field without adequate training and as a result they are not capable of developing proper structures in the factories. A lot of new factories just don't even know what the structures are, because organisers don't have enough time to spend with them. Recogn-



niton is attended to and afterwards the factory gets neglected. New shop stewards must learn for themselves at the shop steward council. The way the shop steward council works tends to develop activists and not structures, because a few activists will attend the shop steward council, and go back to the factory and convey decisions of the council. In my view shop steward councils can only work successfully if they are based on structures in the factory. There is a very dangerous trend if they become shop steward councils of the activists only.

SALB: What about democracy and worker control? Has the union managed to maintain this principle or has participation of leadership in national industrial council negotiations created a separation between rank and file members and leadership?

Berni Fanaroff: I think in the first couple of years there were problems like that, but last year and this year we have been more successful in involving the members. The decision to have chairmen from factories present at negotiations has meant that they have got more decision-making powers. They are our mandating committee. Before it was such that everytime we went to the industrial council as a negotiating committee we had to go back and report to general meetings of the entire union to get new mandates. In theory that is more democratic but in practice I don't believe it is, because in a general meeting it is very difficult to discuss things, particularly if it is a general meeting of ten thousand people. So what tends to happen in such a situation is that the NEC or the negotiating committee will recommend something and it will be approved by a big rally. With the committee of chairmen, each is directly responsible for his own factory and workers in his factory will discipline him if he does wrong. The chairman himself has a much deeper understanding of what we actually are doing during the industrial council meetings. For instance we have been having a lot of problems persuading the chairmen of the factory shop steward committees to accept suggestions from the negotiating committee and they have refused to accept a number of suggestions that we made and instructed us to take their decision.

SALB: Employers don't want workers to be involved in negotiations. They prefer to negotiate away from the factory, so that workers don't know what is happening. Do the shop steward chairmen who attend the negotiations manage effectively to update workers at the factory floor about developments in the industrial council?

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Berni Fanaroff: I think it depends also on factory structures. There are some chairmen obviously who don't report-back, but we had in meetings over two hundred shop stewards out of I suppose three hundred and fifty factories in the Transvaal, plus representations from each of the other regions. We have given chairmen assistance in reporting back by producing pamphlets at the end of each session. This year we have produced a booklet on our demands. Stickers and posters have also been used, and they have raised consciousness among workers so that they do demand report-backs when the chairmen return back to the factories. From what I have picked up, there is a fairly good level of report-backs.

SALB: One of the conditions laid down by MAWU when entering the industrial council was to keep the right to leave the industrial council if the union sees that it can't use it in the interests of workers. So far MAWU has not indicated any intention to leave the council, but at the same time MAWU has never signed any agreement (except the sick pay fund); how do you explain this?

Berni Fanaroff: We need a centralised bargaining system. In fact I would say we are still reluctant to move away from centralised bargaining now. It has given us the ability to mobilise nationally. The problem is that it is a multi-union council. The National Union of Mineworkers has a much easier situation. They're the only union negotiating with the Chamber of Mines, when they deadlock they deadlock. When we deadlock, other unions in the council sell us out. So we still need that centralised bargaining and our participation in it has meant much greater benefits to workers than we had thought of, but there is a problem with multi-unionism. In the long term we are hoping that the merging of metal unions in the industry will mean workers will increasingly move over to our side. SEIFSA has recognised that we are the only union that they must deal with. For instance they have recommended to their member companies that chairmen of shop stewards be allowed to attend industrial council meetings. Some companies pay them, some don't, they have realised that that's an important component to the talks.

SALB: The trap MAWU acknowledged when entering the industrial council was a reliance on the industrial council only. Has MAWU been able to avoid this?

Berni Fanaroff: MAWU is far too anarchic to rely on the council. I think our structures are much too decentralised. In many ways for



instance its impossible to know how many strikes are going on in MAWU at a particular point in time. Members tend to take their own decisions. So I don't think they rely on the industrial council. The only thing to rely on the council for is as a focus for mobilisation. Our members are certainly only too keen to go and take on their own employers over increases, and certainly don't rely on the council.

SALB: The union indicated that it will negotiate at the industrial council only when members have fully discussed all the demands before the industrial council negotiations. Could you explain how this was carried out for the 1987 negotiations?

Berni Fanaroff: It was not perfect. We asked the branches to get demands from the factories, shop steward councils and their own BECs. In fact some branches did not manage to do it, while others did. It was very close to the end of the year. The NEC repeatedly reminded branches to send in demands. In the end the NEC compiled a list of demands from the demands of those branches which had proposed demands, which were then sent back to the branches for discussion, and eventually were taken to the annual general meeting for ratification, but it is not a perfect system. We could not jerk up our branches in time because they should have started the discussions much earlier, in order to produce demands.

SALB: In 1983 the crucial struggle that MAWU saw for the future with reference to its participation in the industrial council was to build the shop steward councils which were to organise new factories and consolidate organised factories. Has this been successful so far?

Berni Fanaroff: The shop steward council has become an accepted part of our union and of COSATU, but there are problems with them. I think in a lot of areas shop steward councils have moved away from their original functions. They have become far more in the nature of activists meetings, and not actual organising meetings. There is a problem with that. We tried to initiate discussion in the locals on what their functions are; we are saying shop steward councils should take up political issues, but they tend to lose contact with the factory structures in some cases. I think this is something that has got to be looked at quite carefully by the shop steward councils themselves. I think in a lot of areas for instance, the locals don't organise new factories or assist in holding factory general meetings and so on.



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We also have other national shop steward councils which are becoming more effective. We now have a national organiser, whose specific responsibility is for the national shop steward councils. Some of them are working very well; for instance Metal Box shop steward council has negotiated a provident fund for Metal Box workers.

SALB: Looking back at the 1986 National Wage Campaign, MAWU members demonstrated their dissatisfaction over the SEIFSA offer of 32c minimum increase per hour in a militant form. Industrial action, stoppages, bans on overtime were the order of the day to pressurise management. What is the situation this year?

MAWU: Members held demonstrations in the factories. Subsequently our members are taking action on the issue of Moses Mayekiso's imprisonment. There have been three national actions on that. So members have not really had enough opportunity to take further action on the wage issue but there are two problems which were not present in 1986. One is that the state of emergency has become much tighter than it was in 1986, the second is that SEIFSA has become much harder; for instance, our members in certain factories have been given final written warnings for the Moses Mayekiso stoppages.

## MAWU/IMF demands for 1987

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. Six months maternity leave, plus 14 days paid paternity leave (see article in previous edition).
6. Improved overtime rates.
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.

On the third round of metal wage talks unions were taken by surprise. SIEFSA offered 2 cents in addition to 30 cents offered on March 14. The SEIFSA offer brings the minimum to R2,52 an hour.

# Cyril Ramaphosa on the NUM congress

The SALB interviewed NUM General Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, on April 15 about the outcome of the union's recent national congress. Those sections of the interview dealing with political policy should be read in conjunction with the political resolution reprinted in the last edition of the Bulletin.

SALB: Looking firstly at the political resolution adopted by the congress: section 1.2 explicitly puts forward socialist objectives; later the resolution goes on to endorse the Freedom Charter. Now the latter - according to most of its exponents - is not a socialist programme; is there then a possible inconsistency in the resolution?

Cyril Ramaphosa: I don't think there is any contradiction. The Freedom Charter in our view, and indeed in the view of workers, contains the minimum demands that have been put forward by the oppressed people in this country. As regards whether it is a socialist document or not, I think that is debateable: it does not lay down a socialist programme and at the same time it is not pro-capitalist. So when we talk about socialism miners are saying that they reject a capitalist system because they have experienced its hardships.

SALB: Certainly one can see the Charter as the minimum demands of the oppressed people as a whole - and that is its strength - but what about the issues which affect workers specifically and which are not taken up in the Freedom Charter. For instance the Charter does not guarantee the right to strike - a right which is necessary at the present and even under some future people's government. Also there is no talk of workers control in the Charter, a cornerstone of the trade union movement during the last decade. Are these things that the union movement should be striving to have included in the Charter or to gain recognition for these things in some way or other?

Cyril Ramaphosa: It is important to note that the Charter contains minimum demands. It is equally important that one interprets the Charter correctly because one could easily attempt to find fault in the Charter and say: it does not contain the right to strike; and it does not contain the fundamental principle that workers are

- interview/Cyril Ramaphosa -

struggling for, that is, workers' control. However if one analyses the Charter correctly one will conclude that where the Charter says, "All who work shall be free to form trade unions to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers" the right to strike is envisaged, how else do you get a wage agreement if you cannot use your economic muscle to get a wage agreement. So it is a set of minimum demands. One could never have expected the Freedom Charter to have said for instance, trade unions shall be recognised in recognition agreements and so forth.

As regards the point about workers control, if I may quote from the Freedom Charter, it says that "the wealth of our country shall be restored to the people." To me restoration of wealth to the people amounts to control.

SALB: In the past - almost the distant past now - unions used to say that they refused to take up a party political position because their membership was often drawn from different political traditions: black consciousness, main-stream congressite, Inkatha even. NUM has now adopted a very firm political stance; do you see a problem of political differences amongst the membership within the union?

Cyril Ramaphosa: No I don't see any problem of political differences cropping up. We have had many debates in our union on political policy. It took us five years to get to the point where we have adopted a very clear political position as well as accepting the Charter as a guiding document in our struggle. We have no fear that the union is going to be divided in any way because when this position was adopted at congress it was by a unanimous decision of the delegates with no abstentions. This was followed by an expression of overwhelming acceptance by almost 20,000 members at the rally held after the congress. There may well be other tendencies in our union, but the feeling amongst the membership is that this is the correct position that should be pursued by our union. If there is to be a change to this position then obviously it would have to go to congress.

SALB: It is probably true to say that for most people the Freedom Charter has a very strong symbolic value - of the struggle for a democratic non-racial South Africa - but does the union see the need now to actually explain the Charter to the membership and how would you go about doing that?



Cyril Ramaphosa: Our union's education programme since the very beginning has been directed at conscientising our membership. With the adoption of the political policy which we now have more clarity and direction has been brought into our education programme. But far from the education department imposing the Charter on workers we are finding that workers are calling in saying they want copies of the Freedom Charter, and they want to get translations so that we can know it better.

Special seminars on the Freedom Charter, our political policy and congress resolutions at national, regional, branch and shaft level are on the increase where serious debates and discussions take place amongst workers. So there is a massive programme underway now to enlighten our membership about the principles of the Freedom Charter and our political policy and other resolutions.

SALB: Can we turn to the question of alliances which you go into in some detail over in the political resolution. In section 1.8 you say that the COSATU policy of working with progressive organisations generally has resulted in confusion, and that it is necessary to define much more tightly just who the union allies with. Could you elaborate on what confusion there has been and how you will overcome that in the future?

Cyril Ramaphosa: The confusion lies in the COSATU resolution which says we will have alliances with progressive organisations full-stop. And we found that organisations that did not have a constituency, organisations that did not account to any constituency, organisations that did not have a proven record of mass mobilisation were jumping on the bandwagon. If one looked at some organisations one found that they existed in name only. So there was a conglomeration of so-called progressive organisations, which when our members started analysing they found that some really did not qualify to be regarded as progressive organisations because, they did not exist at all, or they did not have any proven record. We found that people could easily set up an organisation yesterday and come to a meeting today and say that they are progressive organisations. Thus the need arose that organisations should be defined, and our congress arrived at a definition that is outlined in the political policy and in terms of that definition one is now going to separate the men from the boys.

SALB: On reading the resolution and the definition of the kind of organisation with which NUM is willing to ally, it seems that

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there may be room for further confusion. If one applied those criteria absolutely rigidly there is probably not one organisation that could measure up in every degree in every region. Also there are obviously differences by region: in the Cape you have a very different political history for instance. One can only test such a definition in practice as the situation arises, but would you say it is a set of definitions which does not use political criteria as to who the union will work with? - that you would work with black consciousness organisations as well as the mainstream char-  
terists for instance?

Cyril Ramaphosa: If one looks at the resolution closely I think you will find that it is both political and organisational criteria which will govern our alliances. At a political level the Freedom Charter has been adopted as a guiding document and if there is an organisation which is violently opposed to the principles of the Freedom Charter our members would find it very difficult to regard that as a progressive organisation with which they could get into alliance. It is important at an organisational level to take into account the objective positions pursued by each organisation and how such an organisation interacts with the working people of our country. Today working people are involved in street and defence committees in the townships. There is an organic bond between the township structures and factory floor based structures. Thus linkages created do not take the form of the relationship between Unity Movement and COSATU or NUM for that matter; but they are linkages between basic organs of mass activation which are indispensable for our struggle as we move to an alternative society. Members of the Unity Movement or Azapo or any other obscure organisation are not banned from participating in the struggles of our people.

SALB: So you would be using ideological criteria and not organisational criteria to determine your alliances?

Cyril Ramaphosa: In fact it is a mixture of both. Our members and the leaders of our union will obviously have to judge each organisation as it comes along. Obviously one can't say this is the definitive criteria. But it gives some guidelines as to what to look for in an organisation.

SALB: How do you see NUM's new political stance affecting your wider activity within COSATU? For instance, we are now in the lead up to the COSATU congress in July, will the NUM be seeking to have



its political policy adopted as the political policy of COSATU?

Cyril Ramaphosa: There has been a lot of speculation about that. I think it is usually very natural for a large union like ours after having adopted what is regarded as an important political policy, that it should try and push it through to the mother body. That may well be the case.

SALB: There are of course differing political perspectives within COSATU - not necessarily antagonistic. The other major union to have adopted an explicitly political platform is the Metal and Allied Workers Union at its congress last year. It adopted socialism - as did the NUM congress - but also it called for the drawing up of a workers programme specifically. Can you foresee a possible situation with the two largest affiliates of Cosatu (once the mergers go through) and probably the most powerful and militant having different political policies. Do you see any dangers in that, in terms of division, and do you see the possibility of those two streams being reconciled, and how?

Cyril Ramaphosa: This shows that we are committed to democratic principles of discussing with one another before finally agreeing on a policy which we believe is correct. I think that when we look at the two positions they may appear totally different. Our resolution focuses on the national oppression that we are fighting against, and we believe that the struggle for the seizure of power by the people is by no means a negation of the struggle for an exploitation-free society. I do not think that MAWU can be so erroneous as to believe that in a South Africa of our experience, liberation from racist oppression is no liberation at all. A correct exposition of the character of our struggle will confirm that national consciousness and socialist consciousness are complementary in achieving a South Africa free from national oppression and economic exploitation. Perhaps it needs to be underlined that trade union struggle is not an alternative route to that South Africa of our vision, but rather an indispensable part thereof. And our view is: fine, ultimately there has to be a system where there would not be any exploitation by anybody - a socialist system - but then again you still have to canvas mandates from people. We believe it could be incorrect at this stage to actually say we want this kind of socialism, put it down on paper in black and white, when it is an issue which needs to be canvassed on a much wider scale. Commitment for an exploitation-free society is there. One needs to go further, to canvas the views of very many



- interview/Cyril Ramaphosa -

people. The views of the NUM members who are just a small segment of the organised working class is not enough.

SALB: Was this not the intent of the MAWU resolution: not that the union leadership should lay down a formula for socialism but that the union should actually start collecting the demands of the membership at local level. To add to that, it seems to us that increasingly the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of the Charter is falling away - as you say there is near-universal acceptance - but that now the issue is moving much more towards the question: is socialism on the agenda? And in future that is where debate is likely to be focused. Now your union has adopted a commitment to socialism in a general sense, you say the feeling is there amongst the membership, but you say the mandates have not yet been gathered in order to put that down on paper. Would the union support the idea of saying well we must start to collect those mandates through branch by branch discussion?

Cyril Ramaphosa: I don't think we would be inclined to go in that direction yet. When one looks at our struggle and the way it has developed and looks at the way the struggles of other peoples have developed one finds a lot of similarities. Our situation may be unique but it is also similar to other struggles in the world. Today our people are still saying the demands that are put forward in the Freedom Charter are the immediate demands: apartheid has to go. You ask any worker in a mine or factory, what is it you want? - they will undoubtedly come up with the demands that are enshrined in the Freedom Charter. Their demands are not polemical, they are focusing on the immediate things and our view is that is what must be concentrated on in our struggle. The other objectives come as we proceed and it does not mean that there is a gap between attaining national liberation and socialism. The two issues are clearly on the agenda for transforming the situation in our country. One should not confuse theory and practice - because the practical situation is different. People in general want apartheid dismantled. Socialism is something you start building and learning and working through and discussing and so forth, and you move towards it - and between the two there is no gap. There is immediately a movement from the one towards the other, but of necessity the end of national oppression has to be achieved first.

SALB: But nonetheless sectional or specifically working class demands have emerged - demands which are not enshrined in the Freedom Charter - and we have already said that there may be good

reasons for this in the nature of the document as a "peoples' charter". But in the future is it not going to be essential to give some kind of expression to these kind of specifically working class concerns - whether the right to strike, workers control, socialism or whatever? How will the labour movement deal with this? Take for example the NUM's political policy and its commitment to socialism, how do you start to give that some form - it may not take the form of a fixed document or programme, but how do you construct some kind of framework within which those kind of demands start to be taken up by the movement as a whole? Such demands may - arguably - be ahead of their time, but as you have said those sentiments are widely held in the movement, and unless we are talking about a "two-stage" approach, is there not a necessity for somekind of framework in which these views are expressed?

Cyril Ramaphosa: The demands which are enshrined in the Freedom Charter are the demands put forward by the patriots who in 1955 constituted an extra parliamentary line-up. All the sectors which make up that line-up are not difficult to identify. The authority of the Freedom Charter derives from the fact that it is all embrassive. No sector is inhibited, including the organised working class, from addressing issues specific to its own terrain of struggle - even to the point of democratically collating those issues into a charter of some kind. However we must understand that such a move should not constitute a diversion from the perspectives which have been put forward by our people. In that sense, an Education Charter drafted by students calling for the recognition of democratically elected SRC's in schools should be seen as complimenting the demand for the "opening of the doors of learning and culture to all". Likewise, a Workers' Charter which demands the recognition of unions and democratically elected shop or shaft stewards committees should be seen as complimenting the demand on freedom of association enshrined in the Freedom Charter. Any other position to the contrary, I'm afraid, plays into the hands of those who, in the 1956 Treason Trial characterised the Freedom Charter as a communist and therefore subversive document.

SALB: That prompts an obvious question, that there have been alot of changes since 1955, most notably the rise of the trade union movement, is it not necessary to update the Charter in some ways? And this is a question that has apparently been raised within the national liberation movement itself.

Cyril Ramaphosa: Yes things have changed considerably, although



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many of the demands remain valid and relevant for today. Others obviously need to be looked at again - one needs to put things into focus.

SALB: Do you think that the union movement can make its own contribution to updating the Charter?

Cyril Ramaphosa: Say for instance if the Charter has to be updated, it obviously must be done by a body that is as representative as the Congress of the People in 1955. Because the document that finally became the Freedom Charter, a lot of work was put into it, so one can never argue that the union movement can go it alone on this.

As I indicated earlier there would, in my view, be nothing wrong with a move by sectional groups to advance their own specific demands, as long as whatever document is drafted confines itself to amplifying the relevant demands enshrined in the Freedom Charter and that no attempt should be made to contradict the principles of the Freedom Charter.

SALB: Can we move on and look at some of the other resolutions adopted by the NUM congress. Firstly the question of sanctions. You say that the union will "ensure that whenever sanctions pressures take effect the wealth created by workers remains the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all." But surely the problem that faces your members - particularly in coal - is not the removal of assets but the closing of markets and the loss of jobs that will follow. How will the union handle that?

Cyril Ramaphosa: It is a very difficult situation to deal with. If workers are retrenched what do you do? We address it by saying that our members should be conscientised as to what the full consequences of sanctions are going to be. We do not have a Coca-cola or IBM type situation where they pull out and leave their assets in the country. When a customer refuses to buy our coal - it is a more tricky situation and the best we can do is to make our members aware of the situation. The NUM remains supportive of the sanctions campaign.

SALB: There is a resolution calling for full-time shaft stewards, and obviously given the huge scale of NUM membership there are pressing organisational reasons for such a demand. However, some time ago when we interviewed the chief shop steward from



Volkswagen, he said that there were certain dangers with this; and that management might grant the demand for full-time shop stewards in an attempt to divorce the worker leadership from the shopfloor, giving them an office somewhere, trying to coopt them. (see SALB 11.1) Do you see any such dangers on the mines?

Cyril Ramaphosa: No, we don't have that experience yet. As we see it the membership are the ones who are the watchdogs, because as soon as a shaft steward starts crossing the line towards management the membership is going to immediately chop him off. As it is now we have got full-time shaft stewards at De Beers and Ergo - and they are already on their toes, they are constantly having to watch everything that they do. We are soon going to have full-time hostel representatives. They too are going to be constantly on their toes because they have members who are constantly watching them; every cup of tea that you drink with management members are going to be watching you.

SALB: Your union also decided at this congress to hold the national congress only every two years. Now to my knowledge every other major union holds annual congresses. Two years seems a long time, especially given the very fast rate of political change in South Africa.

Cyril Ramaphosa: It does seem like a long time but it is also very expensive - certainly that is true of a congress as well organised as the one we have just held. We are hoping that in between we will hold special congresses, one day affairs, and it would appear that next year there is definitely going to be a congress - much shorter. Such special congresses would deal with major issues as they arise.

SALB: The NUM congress also adopted a resolution calling for a campaign to bring an end to the migrant labour system, the hostels and all that goes with it. Can you explain the background to that, and how the campaign is going?

Cyril Ramaphosa: Firstly, it has come up after we observed the resurgence of so-called faction fighting on the mines, and having found that these conflicts are essentially caused by the migrant labour system. The blame for all the deaths and injuries we have had can convincingly be put at the door of the migrant labour system, and having realised that, we have to find a way of dealing with it. Hence the need to discuss it at congress and to come up

- interview/Cyril Ramaphosa -

with a resolution which addressed this and to eliminate the kind of conflicts and destruction we have had by eliminating the migrant labour system and start having workers accommodated on a family basis. There is overwhelming support amongst miners for this, in spite of management-initiated surveys which suggest that many workers do not prefer to have their families with them. In fact the contrary is the case, and after congress most of our members, particularly in the coal fields started discussing this and they wanted to prove to management that they want to live with their families and they decided that they would bring their families to the hostels, an indication to management that they are very impatient with the waiting for schemes to be designed and approved. After the congress we sent out a letter to the mining houses as well as to the Chamber calling upon them to come up with a clear statement. All of them so far, except for two, have indicated that they are willing to negotiate with us over hostel control and the whole question of the migrant labour system.

In fact some of them have already approached our shaft stewards and said we want you to put your congress resolution into practice. This has happened with our president who has a special project of putting our resolution into practice in Western Deep Levels. He has already started with this, planning on how the hostels should be run by hostel representatives; the indunas have been given notice that they are on their way out and in some cases they have already been moved; hostel representatives have been elected; constitutions are being drafted. So moves are already underway to deal with this whole issue. It might still come to a head, particularly where the mining companies might resist meeting our demands.

One problem area which will lead to a conflict situation with the mines is their proposed home-ownership schemes. The companies are making an expensive mistake by believing that by introducing home-ownership schemes they will have addressed the whole question of the migrant labour system. The home-ownership schemes which they have designed without our participation are only meant to benefit a few of the workers on the mines, and they want people to believe that once the scheme exists any worker can opt for it, and that is just not the case. We believe that houses should be made available for black workers on the same basis that they have been made available for white workers. White workers have been given houses without having to opt for whether to own or not; the option to own came only at a later stage - once they had started to feel secure.



It is very difficult for any worker to uproot his family from the Transkei and bring the family to an urban area and immediately buy a house - a thing they have never done before in their lives. The government is still having problems with getting people to buy houses in Soweto. There are still many feelings of insecurity and the cost factor puts most people out of the income bracket of being able to buy those houses. So we believe that the houses should be built and should be offered to workers and all workers should be able to be with their families on the mines. Only at a later stage when salaries are high enough and workers believe that they are secure in terms of living there on a permanent basis can these schemes be considered.

SALB: Within the resolution on migrant labour there is a reference to the need for branch committees to establish defense committees. What would their role be?

Cyril Ramaphosa: Their role would be to defend workers against the attacks by elements that are management-instigated.

SALB: Finally, the congress itself, how was it organised and convened?

Cyril Ramaphosa: Representation was on the basis of region. All regions have the same voting power irrespective of size. Our constitution allows for both this system and a proportional system, but ever since the inception of the union the feeling has generally been that all the regions should have equal voting and that came about largely because the union is still growing: other regions are still small; others have become big too quickly; and others have organisational problems and so forth. It was felt that if every region had the same voting power it would be fairer.

The congress itself was very well organised with simultaneous translation in four languages. It was the best union congress I have ever had the privilege of attending. There was a good comradely atmosphere, we started on time, it worked like clock-work. It was a very important congress marking five years of our existence. The documentation was excellent and assisted delegates in following the deliberations. The resolutions were in five languages so people could follow what was taking place.

Resolutions originated from branches, from where they were taken to regional congresses and then to the national congress.



# The battle for trade unions in Namibia

Below an attempt is made to briefly document the recent spate of both real and fictitious labour organising amongst black workers in Namibia. Obviously, trade unions, however genuine, cannot be understood outside the political, cultural and economic structures within which they operate, and Namibia is no exception. We must try not to "Europeanise" (or even "South Africanise") the Namibian workers' situation and experience, although obviously comparisons with many other situations and experiences is essential. We may need to understand some important general conditions in Namibia affecting black workers.

Firstly, there are huge obstacles in Namibia to forming genuine trade unions which can improve wages and working conditions. These are economic (eg. low development of secondary industry; very high rates of unemployment and of absolute poverty; relatively small concentrations of the black workforce etc); cultural (eg. high illiteracy rates, very multi-lingual culture, relatively restricted access to international transport and communications etc); and political (eg. very intensive compound policing, militarisation and colonial repression; almost no open democratic structures; no effective legal right to strike or bargain collectively etc).

Secondly, SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation), although sharing the broad anti-colonial aims, is less peasant (in the pure sense) and petty bourgeois (using the term non-perjoratively) in composition than its counterparts in Zimbabwe, Mozambique etc, and most SWAPO members' families are highly dependent on wages. That means many sons and daughters of SWAPO workers are actively involved in the nationalist liberation war. SWAPO established a Labour Department in 1969. It is not a trade union, but it has helped train Namibian trade unionists, mostly abroad - eg. at the Nduuva Nangola Trade Union Centre in Angola - and it helped to establish the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) in Namibia in 1977/78 (See below). It also facilitates vocational training, worker brigades in the exiled settlements, research and planning and representation at the ILO; much like an embryonic "Ministry of Labour". (Secretary is John ya Otto, an ex-teacher; see his autobiography, Battlefront Namibia).

Thirdly, the creation of anti-SWAPO political forces amongst black

Namibians is almost always based on engendering tribalism through black collaborators paid by the colonial state - eg. the DTA, the MPC etc - and the puppet "unions" are no exception. However, recently, such puppet unions have got backing from the AFL-CIO through its African-American Labour Centre (AALC) using US government funds, and the allied Israeli Histadrut. They are trying to influence the Western-based international union federation, the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, based in Brussels) to adopt an anti-SWAPO and anti-NUNW policy.

With these points in mind, it is easier to understand the following short resume of union developments in Namibia:

1. In the 1977/78 period when the NUNW was publically launched by SWAPO supporters in Namibia (with some Swedish trade union help), it was a general industrial union with branches in all the main towns and mines. The regime was very threatened, especially after the general strike in Windhoek in February 1978 against the shooting of 26 black workers by armed gangs of the pro-South African DTA political grouping. The South African regime at first tried to counter the NUNW's growing influence by passing an amendment to the trade union law (The Wage and Industrial Conciliation Ordinance of 1952 ) in July 1978. This denied registration, and thus legal negotiating rights (including the right to strike after protracted arbitration), to unions with "political affiliations" (ie. which were pro-SWAPO) and which were not "representative" of all grades of employees, ie. white or privileged black workers could thus effectively veto or control any union. The regime thus tried to claim that it was "liberalising" the trade union law. In reality, it was concerned to protect the old white settler employee associations, if necessary by coopting, forcefully or otherwise, a layer of black collaborators.

There were 6 such associations in the South West African Confederation of Labour. (SWACOL) All of these were basically white-collar, except for the South West African Mineworkers Union which had white manual workers based at the Tsumeb mines. Subsequently the SWAMU did manage to recruit some higher paid black workers at the Tsumeb mines (they claimed 300 out of nearly 5,000 black workers in 1982), but the union remained white-dominated and restricted to Tsumeb. (The general manager of the large Rossing Uranium mine called the union a "sweetheart union" in 1983). Attempts by the other staff associations to recruit blacks were also small-scale, slow and token and they remained white controlled.



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The NUNW, however, continued to grow rapidly in 1978 and, following a series of strikes on major mines, including Tsumeb, in late 1978 and early 1979, the regime arrested the NUNW leadership, confiscated its funds and vehicles and closed its office in Windhoek. Nevertheless, a strong identification with the NUNW remained and was to resurface dramatically in 1986.

2. With increased US involvement by the Reagan Administration after 1981 some black Namibians under Andries Shipanga who were expelled from SWAPO (and who in 1985 joined South Africa's puppet government), such as Solomon Mufima, were given AFL-CIO (AALC) backing and set up a "Namibia Trade Union Council" in 1982. Some Namibians were sent to the US for trade union training. In 1983, after training in Israel, one Kambode set up a "Namibia Federation of Trade Unions" based in Oshakati. The two bodies tried to unite to "replace SWAPO at the ILO". This failed however, and both bodies are today defunct.

3. In June 1985 some of the (Herero-based) SWANU (South West African National Union) group under the leadership of Moses Katjuiongua joined the puppet government and Katjuiongua later became Labour "minister". Two of his supporters, Kangueehi and Ngaujake, set up a "Namibia National Trade Union" (NNTU) in December 1985 declaring that it "recognised the UN Council for Namibia", (a propaganda ploy) and that they would "seek the understanding of employers and government". Meanwhile Katjuiongua and the general secretary of the SWACOL (Ben Schoeman) went to Western Europe to get support, especially from the ILO and the ICFTU. SWACOL had announced in 1983 that it would apply for membership of the ICFTU "at the right moment" and it also applied to join the International Metalworkers' Federation in Geneva, (the outcome of this and other international trade secretariat membership applications of SWACOL affiliates is unknown). Both Katjuiongua and Schoeman were refused a meeting by ILO officials in November 1985. SWACOL claimed in September 1983 however, to have received recognition from one French union federation (reportedly the Christian Labour Confederation - CTFC) but was rebuffed when trying to approach various British trade unions. Katjuiongua also went to Israel in June 1986 to get help for his newly-created "National Labour Council" - a state monitoring board dominated by whites. Meanwhile the NNTU claimed to have registered a "Namibian Retail Workers' Union" with Katjuiongua's department in April 1986. Another unconfirmed report in 1986 was that the AFL-CIO's AALC had set up an office in Windhoek. It already has an office in Gaborone.



It seems, therefore, that the anti-SWAPO collaboration between white settlers and black clients in South Africa's puppet government structures, aided and abetted by the current US administration, is likely to be replicated at the union level through the creation of an anti-NUNW front. The SWACOL and NNTU structures could be united to try to achieve this, but their lack of significant black worker support makes them crucially dependent on slick public relations work and outside support.

4. Other elements of the (Herero-based) SWANU (calling themselves "progressives" or "left"), probably the majority of SWANU, refused to join Pretoria's client regime. It is possible that some may be associated with the NNTU through old links, but otherwise they have not tried to organise black workers in unions. Their leader, Rukoro, helped to set up a Legal Aid and Community Advice Bureau (LACAB) in August 1985. Rukoro is director of LACAB which has been based in the so-called "coloured" township of Khomasdal, Windhoek. This was done with the help of Ottie Abrahams and the Khomasdal Residents Association. It apparently received funding from abroad. LACAB reported dealing with numerous employment grievances of black workers in 1986, but at the time of writing LACAB was reported defunct and Rukoro was in the USA on a study course.

5. Although one of SWAPO's main labour organisers, Jason Angula (the Secretary for Labour inside Namibia) has been under virtual house arrest since 1979, this has not stopped SWAPO sympathisers in Namibia from re-establishing the NUNW as an open union federation during 1986. SWAPO's very visible public mobilising activities during 1986 have included some of the largest rallies seen in Namibia, (including rallies at Rossing and Tsumeb mines), and the SWAPO President, Sam Nujoma, in a message to a large "Namibia Day" rally in Katutura, Windhoek, in August 1986, threatened to call a general strike if the Pretoria Government does not implement the UN plan for Namibia's decolonisation. As part of this general mobilisation, and inspired by the successes of COSATU in South Africa, a series of workers' committees affiliated to the NUNW have been set up at all the major mines and at numerous workplaces throughout Namibia. The NUNW's national organiser, Ben Ulenge (a recently released long-term SWAPO prisoner on Robben Island) has been leading such efforts. It is intended that these workers' committees will amalgamate into national industrial unions. Thus, on September 20 1986, the NUNW launched the Namibian Food & Allied Union (NAFAU) led by Alfons "John" Pandeni (another long-term SWAPO prisoner on Robben Island), claiming

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6,000 members in 27 firms. In the following two weeks the NAFAU won two disputes - one at a Luderitz chemical factory, and another at the Okahandja abattoir. Both involved strikes which were 100% supported by black employees and the Okahandja strike was backed up by sympathy strikes by NAFAU abattoir workers in Windhoek.

6. Following the efforts during 1985 by the National Union of Mineworkers (SA) to unionise the 3,000 black Namibian workers at the Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM) in Oranjemund, on the southern Namibian border with South Africa, and discussions with some of the 2,500 Rossing Uranium mine workers at Arandis in central west Namibia (these two mines alone dominate Namibia's economy), the regime attempted to bring in new laws to stop "foreign" trade union activity in Namibia. Although one draconian attempt by Katjuiongua and other puppets to amend the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Ordinance was halted by the South African Administrator General in December 1985, the regime introduced the "Regulation of Residence of Certain Persons in South West Africa Act" on April 1 1986 which allows for the banning or deportation of "aliens". Nevertheless, the establishment of workers' committees by the NUNW on these and other mines in anticipation of setting up a Namibian mineworkers' union has gone ahead. An indication of the solidarity and political consciousness of black workers at these mines was shown recently by the 100%-supported black workers' stayaway for one week in mid-October of CDM's 80th anniversary celebrations; the 3,000 workers protesting at CDM's plunder and collusion with colonialism. Although a "Rossing Mine Workers Union" was announced in April 1986, which was trying to register under the restrictive trade union laws, it looks increasingly as though this will be subsumed by the NUNW initiative. A key battle will be how far the employers and white workers can maintain the SWACOL union at the Tsumeb mines in the face of the NUNW challenge.

7. The NUNW in exile is also stepping up training work and is reportedly opening an office in Lusaka. However, there are reports of AFL-CIO inspired efforts to stop Western trade unions, most of which are affiliated to the ICFTU, from offering assistance to the NUNW. This is coupled with AFL-CIO efforts to support the "labour wings" of both UNITA (this has been done for several years now) and the MNR (a new move).

(Brian Wood, Namibia Support Committee, UK, 16.11.86)

# UPDATE: Namibian trade unions

Major developments since my last report have been:

1. The inaugural congress of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (see interview with Ben Ulenge). MUN currently claims about 12,000 members. And the MUN has begun to successfully intervene in disputes and grievances.
2. Two further disputes involving the NAFAU - the first at Sigmarks food wholesalers, actually only a very small concern in Windhoek, where NAFAU members were sacked and the police were brought in; and another amongst the lobster fish workers at Luderitz which was successful and which got high media coverage in Namibia.
3. The closure of the Klien Aub copper mine in mid-March where about 500 workers were laid off with minimal notice and responded by refusing to shift machinery and demanding pension, redundancy pay etc. The MUN were involved again here.
4. The West European tour of Ben Ulenga. This has created a real stir because the AFL-CIO, who have been backing the puppet unions (NNTU, NTU, NFTU), has persuaded the ICFIU to send a "fact finding" mission to Namibia (obviously to try to avoid having to recognise the NUNW) and a number of the West European sections are suspicious of the manoeuvre. The TUC officially gave Ben a warm welcome, and the constituent unions like the TGWU, NUM, NALGO, NUPE etc were very enthusiastic (the NUM are doing a video on the NUNW and MUN).
5. During April the NUNW will be establishing a new union for Building, engineering, metal and allied workers, the name yet to be decided. See the interview on this, and other prospective new unions.

(Brian Wood, NSC, April 1987)



# Ben Ulenge on Namibian trade unions

The following interview was conducted in the UK by Brian Wood of the Namibia Support Committee during March, 1987.

Brian Wood: So, after your imprisonment on Robben Island, when you were released in Windhoek, what did you do between then and April 1986 when the Steering Committee of the National Union of Namibian Workers was elected?

Ben Ulenge: Well, there are SWAPO structures in Windhoek. The people are still very active, especially at the branch level. So I joined up. First, we looked at the situation now, just trying to see where I could fit in. The SWAPO Youth League branch, or the Youth League wing of the branch, they took us in. I took part in a few meetings, some of which were disrupted by the police. I was actually also arrested at some of these. But then we started with this committee which was established to get the NUNW on its feet again. And that's how I came to be involved with the workers' committees.

Brian Wood: Were you inspired by the unions in South Africa?

Ben Ulenge: Maybe that's also a part of it. You find that in South Africa they got off the ground earlier and we know that the organised workers in South Africa are quite a solid part of the struggle there. Of course the situation tends to differ from the situation prevailing in Namibia but the Namibian people, workers themselves, also have that long history of workers' action.

Brian Wood: Even though they haven't been in trade unions as such?

Ben Ulenge: Ya, exactly.

Brian Wood: Were there other inspirations, for example, I know that the miners' strike here in Britain was publicised in southern Africa quite a lot. Did you hear about those things?

Ben Ulenge: Yes, we followed what was happening in, I think it was 1983/4 or 84/5. The one thing that really surprised us at that time regarding the miners' strike here was the steps ta'en by the

government against the miners. It was almost like it was South Africa or Namibia. We didn't really expect that now the government in Britain could go as far as confiscating union funds and all those things. We thought unions here were entirely free and workers could do what they felt were in their interests. So of course we were quite surprised to see some of these things happening. We were following the situation and it was very sad that, although it was a very long dispute, at the end there were I think very many problems.

Brian Wood: Can you describe the new resurgence of the NUNW from April 1986. What are the main developments?

Ben Ulenge: As I mentioned ... we had a meeting, or rather ... some of us were arrested at a Youth League meeting in 1986, that was January 26; most of the people who were arrested were actually miners, workers. There were some from the Outjihase mine just outside Windhoek, there were some others, and then there were people from the Youth League and several others. So after our release, we had a meeting. We were discussing the general situation in Namibia and so on and what we could do. And then the question of the dormancy of the NUNW came up and we started to discuss the main causes of why there wasn't much being done on the labour situation. From this meeting there were some suggestions that we followed up later and we called another meeting where a committee of people was elected. Most of them were the SWAPO branch, some of them were workers. Of course all those from the SWAPO branch were workers also but I mean there were also people who were directly involved in SWAPO. So a committee was elected to start reactivating the NUNW inside the country. From this committee, again, a smaller committee was elected which basically contained field workers; and I was made head of the field workers' group. So that's how we started. There was one car that we obtained. We started to go out to some companies in Windhoek and the surrounding area. We found that at some of these places, the workers had their own workers' committees still going on. At some places you had committees initiated by the companies and these were quite useless and workers were very unhappy with them. And at others again you found that there were workers' own committees, selected by the workers themselves. Of course they didn't have any links with committees outside their workplaces. So we had discussions with these people.

We would, for example, come and start talking about the situation

- interview/Ben Ulenge -

of the workers there. We would discuss what they usually do if they are faced by problems. Lets say, all of a sudden, a worker didn't get his wages or his wages were cut. Sometimes, they discuss it in their committees if they had them. Sometimes again you find a person would stand up on his own and demand what happened to his wages - and of course sometimes he would be fired from work. Then we went on to discuss the appropriate steps that workers could take in order to change the situation. And of course the workers generally agreed that some sort of organisation was necessary. So sometimes we started organising illegal meetings because we had to have meetings on the sites, on the premises, without having approached management. It went fairly well until we had quite a few committees in Windhoek and in the surroundings. That was April, May, June until August last year.

Brian Wood: How many workers' committees had you organised by say August?

Ben Ulenge: Oh there were many I think about 40 in all. There were about 28 committees all of which belonged, or had to do with, the food industries. There were people from the dairy industries, from the breweries, from some Coca Cola plants, from the meat industries, from the hotels and so on. So we organised a meeting of people from various committees who decided to come together. At first we had church facilities, especially the Catholic church in Katutura which helped a lot. If we wanted to have a meeting they would give us their hall. So we started having these meetings between committees of the various places. People were discussing generally what they should do and it was discussed, proposals came, and it was decided now that there would be a big congress of the food industry workers. At some places you find that commercial people who sell food and other things, and workers from wholesalers, also got involved in this because we also had committees there. Then, in September, there was the launching congress of the Namibian Food and Allied Union. That's how it was organised, more or less.

The committees that we organised were not all food industry committees. There were municipality workers involved, there were miners, there were transport people, railway workers and so on. But most of the committees were from the food and related industries. That's how, that's why, at first the Namibian Food and Allied Union was established. It was the first to be created.



Brian Wood: Would you say that the workers' committees were shop floor organisations or were they compound-neighbourhood organisations or both?

Ben Ulenge: No, we didn't really go to organise on the compound or neighbourhood level. We went directly to the workplaces. We have had some discussions before that because we looked at the way the NUNW started to organise in the late 1970s and they did it more or less at the SWAPO level. You see they had neighbourhood ... actually they went to the hostels and they organised workers and this resulted in a situation where workers felt very strong when they were all together in the hostel. But they they didn't do much at the workplace. So what we started in 1986 was to have a firm basis at the workplace. These committees were elected by the workforce in each place.

Brian Wood: And were the workers' committees almost like shop steward organisations which elected their own leaders?

Ben Ulenge: Yes, they were elected by the workers themselves ... One thing you find, of course, is that there is not very much experience as far as we are concerned regarding basic trade unionism. We still need to cover a lot in that direction.

For example, what was happening was that, lets say we go to the workers in Outjihase, which is a mine. They have a hostel there, all the workers work in one mine and we didn't go to the workplace, to the mine of course; we went to the hostel because here all workers are from the same workplace. So we had a meeting with several of them. Not all of course. Some were on duty, some were doing other things. Lets say we met with about 200 out of 500. We started discussing generally about the situation and everybody agreed that there were lots of problems going on and something should be done. And then the ideas were coming up. Some workers were coming up with proposals. We were also coming up with proposals. It was suggested that they elect a committee at the meeting. When the committee was elected we proposed that now it should direct the further organisation of the workers. They should talk more about their problems. They should even try to get membership already at that time. There was no membership before. We didn't think that normally the NUNW should have cards. But then we had these cards and we started to use them at that moment. So a person felt he belonged as a member of the NUNW. So that's what happened. It was only later that we started talking about shop

- interview/Ben Ulenge -

stewards; that every department on the mine had to have its own committee. Wherever a team went out we had to organise at that level too. And we have right now, as miners now, we have already started organising the Mineworkers Union of Namibia.

Brian Wood: This was formed when?

Ben Ulenge: That was formed after the Namibian Food and Allied Union - the NAFU - that in September last year. After the formation of NAFU I was assigned by our field workers committee, with the Steering Committee, to concentrate more on the mineworkers. Working in a team, we started going out linking up with miners' committees at Rossing, at CDM and TCL mainly, and we also went to other mines of course. Outjihase was one of our first committees. We found that TCL workers already had a very big committee. They were dealing with most of their problems on a local level. Then Rossing workers even went so far as organising a local union. And the CDM people were also going in that direction. So we got some of these people together. We found that, for example, the workers in CDM and Rossing already had a sort of liaison committee. They were thinking of linking the two mines together. The idea that came out of our meetings was to have one single union for the whole industry in the country. That's how later we had a launching congress of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia which was on November 23 last year.

Brian Wood: Did you and the other organisers go to all these mines, including down at CDM, Oranjemund?

Ben Ulenge: No. At one time members of the Rossing Committee came to Windhoek. We had a meeting with them. Then we went very many times to Outjihase. We went to Tsumeb. We went to Uis. One can't go to CDM, to Oranjemund. It's a diamond district and visitors are not allowed. You have to apply. It's a very long process. Sometimes they won't permit you, even if you apply. So again, the people from Oranjemund came. We met some. We used to meet some way in the southern towns. They drove out of Oranjemund. We also drove out of Windhoek. And we had meetings there. Of course, this was not the issue of forming committees with the CDM people. It was just a question of co-ordinating themselves with the other committees and so on. As I said, they had already started some co-ordination with Rossing people. So we only had to come together, all of us and press for the idea of having one single union. And that's actually what happened.

Brian Wood: I believe in late 1985 or early 1986 the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa tried to assist organising at CDM and possibly in Rossing?

Ben Ulenge: Ya. The NUM was quite helpful. Although they didn't really assist in the formation of the MUN but they have had some contributions there. You find that there are some workers from South Africa who are working in Oranjemund. So what they did, the NUM people they came to negotiate an access agreement with CDM and this was allowed. So they had the chance of coming into CDM. They were already a union, of course, and CDM knows very much about them. So they came into Oranjemund and had a chance of meeting our workers informally; and of course they discussed unions and so on. As the Rossing workers tried to have their own local union, they also linked up with the people in South Africa. Sometimes they exchanged material for some in South Africa. In South Africa they have a longer experience so they could sit down and discuss and especially give them materials - some booklet on international union federations and all those things. And of course about unions in South Africa. So there was this exchange of material resources and so on. At one time we also had a meeting with NUM officials from South Africa. We discussed matters generally concerning unions and so on. We told them about our intentions and they promised to help wherever they could. Especially after the establishment of the MUN, links between the South Africans and ourselves are quite strong now in terms of supporting each other orally, even materially - sometimes through some of these booklets and so on which they give us whenever they have them.

Brian Wood: Is there a link between the NUNW and COSATU in South Africa?

Ben Ulenge: Yes. There are links. We can't really talk much in depth ... the NUNW field workers went to South Africa; they were invited by COSATU actually, and they took part in some negotiations there. They saw how the people in South Africa, the comrades there, were working in the field itself. They stayed there for about 2 weeks and, as such, they gained a lot you see, in field experience and so on. And again, you find that the COSATU people would send us their newsletter, all these types of things.

Brian Wood: What is the relationship now between the NUNW and the PO Department of Labour?



- interview/Ben Ulenge -

Ben Ulenge: Actually we are very closely related, especially because of the nature of our problems in the country. As I said, it is impossible actually to divide workers' problems from the colonial oppression that we are experiencing in the country. You find that the colonial authorities make laws and most of these are regarding workers and the workers have no say in these laws because nobody in the country has any say. So what applies to the workers in particular, applies to the Namibian people in general. For example when we started to organise, the committee was assigned the task of resuscitating, or getting the NUNW on its feet again, we linked up with the SWAPO Labour Department. We discussed the matter. We got their views. We got their analysis of the situation and so on. But their involvement here is, let's say, political. If we want to link up with SWAPO, of course, we'll go through them. We'll go through the SWAPO Secretary for Labour. So there is a link. One can't say the NUNW is part of the structure. But, of course, we believe that the workers' movement can only function as a part and parcel of the national liberation struggle.

Brian Wood: Has the NUNW got a special approach to women's organisation, making sure that women's voices are heard?

Ben Ulenge: So far in the NUNW Steering Committee, which was established last year which has 12 members, we have 4 women; that's in the top committee of the NUNW. It's a Steering Committee, a sort of temporary body. And again, when you look at the NAFAU union, for example, you find that they have a National Executive Committee of about 12 people and I think there are two women on this committee. So, I think it's still a long way to go to a situation where there will be half of the members of the committee being women. Indications are there that women are letting themselves be heard and, depending on what problems women have in future, I'm sure that their voice will be increasingly heard.

Brian Wood: Women workers in other countries are often excluded from union meetings because meetings happen after work when women are expected by men to go and cook the meals and look after the kids for the husbands. Is there an attempt made by the NUNW to make sure when meetings are called, women workers can be there?

Ben Ulenge: It's also the case in Namibia that meetings have to take place after work. I think it's difficult to organise meetings any other time. But then what I have seen is that, for example, when we have had some meetings with workers from the "SWA Meat"

lant, quite a number of their workers are women. and they used to come to the meetings. Of course, such problems were raised. Women were saying that we have to close earlier, that they have to go and cook, but they come to the meetings. I think it's a problem what has to be looked at. So far we haven't really been unable to have a meeting because women have to go and cook.

Brian Wood: Do women feel confident to speak out in the meetings about their problems? and do they earn less than male workers doing the same job?

Ben Ulenge: Ya, they do. I think again, even though they speak out; at workers' meetings I have seen women speaking out - I've seen them at the Okahandja meat factory and the Windhoek SWA Meat factory speaking out - but, there are other places where I have seen women being shy or being less confident to speak out.

Brian Wood: Do you think that depends on the attitudes of their male comrades in the workplace and how they are treated?

Ben Ulenge: Ya, partly on that, and partly on experience. There are women who maybe have grown up in such a way that they still believe that they should play a lower profile than men.

Brian Wood: Does the NUNW have a policy which is against the oppression of women similar to the policy against racial oppression?

Ben Ulenge: Yes. I think we have taken that from SWAPO. You find that in the constitution of the NUNW, it is expressed there that the aim of the organisation is to organise all the workers into their own trade unions irrespective of a person's colour, race, sex and creed.

Brian Wood: Are there any white members of the NUNW at the moment?

Ben Ulenge: In the Steering Committee we have people who are whites, who are coloured and so on. In the mines we have members of the MUN who are white and coloured. I'm not so sure with the FAU. Whites who are progressive, who consider themselves Namibians as any other Namibian citizen, where they move alongside in the struggle - you find them in SWAPO and in the NUNW.

Brian Wood: But generally, most of the white workers refuse to join a non-racial union?

- interview/Ben Ulenge -

Ben Ulenge: Ya, its like that. Maybe, going back to the municipality workers, they used to have an old whites-only association called the South West Africa Municipal Staff Association. It is still in existence. The only thing they have done with it is they have now, theoretically, opened up membership to blacks. The problem is, not a single black worker feels part of that thing, that association. What they have been told was, there is this association, its now open to all races, here are the forms and the amount that has to be subtracted from your wages. Some of them have filled in the forms and their money is being subtracted. Nothing else is happening. They don't hold meetings; they don't hold any open union discussions; there is no union organisation.

Brian Wood: If you had a message to socialists in Britain, what would you say to them?

Ben Ulenge: Maybe I would say, they should just concentrate more, put more into trying to stop all the avenues through which governments such as Thatcher's, and the Western establishment, through which they go to support South Africa. I think there is such a lot that people here can do. They only need to be organised more. There are people here who are aware of this. I knew that, of course, there was some awareness here, but, what I have seen is that there is a greater capacity.

Brian Wood: Do you think that for them to support the Namibian working class is in their interests as well?

Ben Ulenge: Yes, for sure. An example that can be used is, I have seen here how Thatcher is still trying to rob away some of the rights that the unions here have gained over the years. It has become clear over the past years that governments such as Thatcher's can be as repressive as the South African government itself. You find that most of the natural resources that these people get, that keep them in power, they come from countries such as ours - such as Namibia. So we feel that, in order to break the back of the ruling class, we have to concentrate on all the arenas of struggle. People here should know that the struggle that we are waging, the victories that we are winning in southern Africa, for example, will contribute to the emancipation of the working class here in Britain too ... So I can only say the struggle continues comrades, yes.



# Productivity and incentive schemes to engage or not to engage?

Peter Lewis\*

productivity schemes based on work study and incentive bonuses pose a special problem for unions in South Africa because in general, basic wage rates are low, so managements can impose stringent work study schemes which boost output considerably, while paying only small production bonuses. This is made worse by the insecurity of employment at present, which locks workers into their present jobs.

SATU has issued policy statements on productivity schemes, which assert the priority for the trade union movement of the campaign to raise basic wages. Individual unions have followed different strategies in dealing with employers on the issue of productivity: some have tried to get work study and bonus schemes scrapped altogether; others have engaged to varying degrees with the schemes.

## The case of the Everite moulded goods department

This article deals with the Transport and General Workers' Union (formerly General Workers Union) approach to the work study and bonus scheme at Everite. The scheme was in operation before the company was unionised, and the union initially tried and failed to get the scheme scrapped. Subsequently, this strategy changed to one of negotiating some of its main principles, and limited involvement in its operation.

Everite has three production plants in South Africa, manufacturing moulded and sheet products for construction and other purposes out of asbestos-reinforced cement. The plants are at Brackenfell near Cape Town, East London, and Kliprivier near Johannesburg. The majority of Everite's workforce are contract labourers on annually renewable contracts. A work study and incentive payment scheme has generated in the moulded goods departments of all three plants

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The author works for the Industrial Health Research Group. He gratefully acknowledges assistance given by officials of the TGWU, Cape Town, and Judy Maller.

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since the late 1970s. In recent years, demand for Everite's products has been affected by the recession, and there have been retrenchments and short-time working in all departments at Kliprivier and Brackenfell from 1984 onwards. At Brackenfell, a major retrenchment took place in October/November 1984, one month after the union was recognised by the company. A recognition agreement was signed at Brackenfell in September 1984, at Kliprivier in 1985, and in East London early in 1986. The work study and bonus scheme in the moulded goods departments was a major reason why moulders joined the union in the first place, a was among the first issues to be considered by the union after unionisation and recognition from the company.

### The work study and bonus schemes

Moulders fill moulds by hand with moist cement material, using simple hand-held tools to cut away excess material. The products take from 5 minutes to several hours to mould, depending on their complexity. After moulding and drying, the moulders knock out the products, and clean and oil the moulds. The products are then given a quality check by the supervisors, and any flawed products are rejected. Before the final agreement between the union and the company on the bonus scheme, the moulders were mainly on grade 16 of the Peromnes grading system, with some on grade 17. These are unskilled or "semiskilled" grades.

Production in the moulded goods departments is subject to performance standards arising from a work study scheme. According to this scheme, the work study officer times a moulder as he makes one article, and allowances are added for relaxation, fetching and carrying. The total time for the job is then adjusted to conform with predetermined standards which assume a "brisk, efficient pace of work". The result is a "standard time" for the job. Moulders are given production targets each day, which assume that the moulders will maintain standard times throughout the working day. This is called "100% performance". This contrasts with work study schemes in other South African companies and European companies which set lower targets in recognition of the fact that workers under normal conditions do not maintain this kind of pace all day

At Everite, moulders may face disciplinary action if they do not reach their targets. If they exceed the targets they earn a production bonus. For example, if a product has a standard time of 10 minutes, and a moulder makes 5 more than his daily target, he

has earned 50 minutes bonus time. At Everite, this bonus time is paid at less than three-quarters of basic hourly rates (70%). The combination of the carrot of bonus earnings and the stick of disciplinary action ensures that despite the fact that no machine is pacing their work, the moulders at Everite work fast.

There are three important aspects to this scheme. The first is what it puts pay rates onto an individual basis. This had the effect in Everite of tying some moulders' allegiance to the scheme because they were able to earn substantial bonuses compared with their weekly wage. By working fast, and putting in extra hours, a moulder might reach a weekly bonus of R30, which is substantial when measured against a basic weekly wage of around R120, as was the case for most moulders in 1986. Other moulders, however, because of lack of experience, or because they could not keep up the pace, earn little or no bonus. This is particularly a problem for the older workers. The overall effect of the bonus scheme was therefore potentially divisive.

The second point concerns overtime. There is no official overtime worked by the moulders at Everite plants. However, from the beginning of the scheme, moulders claimed they were starting the day early and finishing late just to reach their targets, but received no overtime pay. The management has denied that they are putting in excess hours, but has stated that if workers do choose to start early, they stand to increase their bonuses.

The third point is that moulders do not generally understand how their pay is calculated, or how their daily production targets are decided upon. A moulder is paid last week's bonus this week, so he is unlikely to remember whether his production is up or down for that period. Pay slips record only how much bonus is paid, so the moulders have no record of how this is arrived at. At Brackenfell, the targets included a certain amount of bonus production, but the workers did not understand this.

#### The scheme in practice and the go-slow at East London

Work study is a management tool, and there is little room for negotiation over the details of the scheme at shop floor level. There is little or no discussion between the work study officers and the moulders over the method study or the times for the jobs. The way the scheme was administered was therefore a constant issue during the discussions at the various plants.



At Brackenfell, the union took up the issue of the bonus scheme with the plant management soon after recognition in 1984. The position of the union then was that the scheme should be scrapped. The management refused, instead agreeing to "explain" the complexities of the scheme to the moulders so that there would be fewer "misunderstandings". The dissatisfaction of the moulders surfaced frequently in monthly meetings between the workers' committee and the management throughout 1985 and 1986. The moulders found it increasingly difficult to reach their production targets. They challenged the number of rejected products (as these are not counted when the bonuses are calculated), and the fact that supervisors invariably gave "worker error" as the reason for rejects. Bonus earnings fluctuated from week to week, which clashed with a "rate for the job" conception that the moulders had of their pay. The moulders claimed that job-times were becoming progressively tighter, and that a speed-up was in progress. The most contentious issue was the question of unpaid overtime. Throughout these negotiations, the management at Brackenfell insisted that the scheme was "scientific", and could not be changed in any significant way.

At the wage negotiations at the end of 1985, the union again made the demand that the system should be scrapped. Management again refused, but agreed that it could be discussed in the course of 1986 and that "mutually agreed adjustments" could be made.

The moulders at East London and Kliprivier experienced the same kinds of problems as those at Brackenfell, but it was at East London where the issue became a dispute. The moulders there had been dissatisfied with the scheme before the union was recognised in the plant in early 1986. In July 1984, the management introduced a dual system of "ordinary moulders" and "senior moulders". The division was based on output levels. High performers were given the option of going onto a higher basic hourly pay rate, but their production targets were increased by 30%. Most of the moulders opted to become senior moulders, and the problem of excess hours of work became acute. By November 1984, output levels were very high. In December, the management announced that in order to bring the times for jobs into line with those at Brackenfell and Kliprivier, the standard times for the jobs were to be reduced by 20%. At the same time the average weekly bonus of R13 was incorporated into basic rates. At this point, all except 10 of the moulders opted to become ordinary moulders as they could no longer keep up the pace. However, they were still working excess hours.

In July 1986, the moulders took a collective decision to work to rule: shop stewards at East London reported that the moulders there decided to start work only at 7am, and to finish at 5pm. This decision took a long time because some of the moulders were unwilling to accept the loss of bonus earnings that this would entail. When the work to rule was implemented, output in moulded foods plummeted by more than 25%, by 33% for senior moulders.

The plant management responded by informing the moulders by letter that the new output levels were unacceptable to the company. They argued that the loss of output increased the cost of production, which would lead to the company losing its competitive position in the market. This would mean a loss of customers, and therefore retrenchment for the moulders. The company hinted that they would transfer production from East London to the other plants unless output levels returned to normal within one week. 20 moulders were given level 2 warnings: the next step would be mass dismissal. The management offered to involve a shop steward in checking times for the jobs, and to take "suggestions" about how the moulders might reach their targets. The committee rejected this, and the management would discuss nothing until output was restored.

The East London plant was more recently organised than the Brackenfell plant, and the possibility of sustaining a major dispute over mass dismissals there was not assured. Moreover, the company's threat to move production to Brackenfell and Kliprivier had to be taken seriously, since the company had been rationalising and retrenching already, and might take the opportunity to continue this trend. It would be very difficult to monitor transfers of orders to the other plants and take solidarity action.

The East London events came at a time when union officials dealing with the problem at Brackenfell were developing a set of proposals for alterations to the scheme. They had seen that "mutually agreed adjustments" at plant level would have very little effect. Even a proposal that the payslips should show how bonuses were calculated was refused by the plant management on cost grounds. Shop stewards and officials therefore decided to put forward proposals within the framework of the scheme, but which could substantially improve working conditions. However, since these proposals were not merely minor adjustments, they would have to be tabled at the annual wage negotiations. The dilemma for the union at this stage was whether to advise the East London committee that they should pursue the work to rule vigorously and

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risk dismissal and defeat for the moulders, or whether to advise them to back down on the issue, until it could be raised at the annual wage negotiations; thus taking pressure off the management.

The action of the East London moulders unexpectedly paid off. As a result of the pressure from East London, the company proposed to the union that the work study scheme should be on the agenda of a special negotiating meeting before the annual wage negotiations in September. Therefore, the committee at East London was advised by the union officials to return to more normal output levels pending the national negotiations. At the special meeting on the bonus scheme, the union put forward the following demands:

1. Bonus should be paid from a performance level of 75%, as opposed to the current 100%. In work study schemes overseas, this level of 75% is called "normal performance" as opposed to "standard performance", and takes into account the average pace of work over the whole working day.
2. Bonus time should be paid at 100% of the basic hourly rate, as opposed to the current 70%. This was in recognition of the fact that bonus production is like overtime worked during normal hours, and should therefore be paid at a minimum of basic hourly rates.
3. Moulders should be paid at no less than the minimum rate applicable for grade 16 in their first year of service and thereafter at no less than the rate applicable for grade 15. This demand was an attempt to get formal recognition of the skills involved in moulding.

The management partially conceded the first and third of these points. The final agreement, signed by Everite and the TGWU on December 3 1986, included the following clauses:

- \* all three plants were included
- \* the bonus starting point will be reduced to 90% of the "required standard performance" for all moulders. This means that targets will be based on an expectation of "90% performance" instead of "100% performance."
- \* bonus production will continue to be paid at only 70% of basic hourly rates.
- \* by January 1988 all present moulders will progress onto Peromnes grade 15. In future, there will be a standard grading procedure where trainee moulders will be on grade 17 for 6 weeks, grade 16 for 1 year, and finally on grade 15. Basic



rates will be the minimum applicable to the relevant Peromnes grade. The new basic hourly rates are as follows:

Grade 17 (trainee)	- R2,50
Grade 16	- R2,70
Grade 15	- R3,03

The most important gain for the union in this agreement is that the targets for production have been reduced, and the management can no longer argue that the times and targets for jobs are "scientific" in the sense of non-negotiable. Another gain is that within a year all moulders will be on the same (higher) grade and basic hourly rate, and the vested interests that "senior moulders" gained in the scheme will be removed. Other small differences between the operation of the scheme in different plants will also disappear. This will make it easier for the union to act in a united way over the scheme in future.

### Conclusion

After an initial attempt to get the work study and bonus scheme scrapped at Brackenfell, the union became involved in detailed negotiations at plant level at Brackenfell on specific grievances the moulders brought forward in relation to the work study scheme. It rapidly became clear, however, that the scheme was too rigid, and management too inflexible, for these grievances to be settled in this way. The union officials therefore started to develop a policy for negotiating the principles of the scheme should an opportunity arise. The action taken by the East London moulders created such an opportunity as it forced the company management to table the work study scheme for negotiation at company level.

The union is now considering extending involvement in the scheme by accepting management's offer to train a shop steward from each moulded goods department in work study techniques. The role of such a person from the union's point of view would be to press for any outlandish job-times to be reassessed, to get some control over the activities of the work study officers, and to take up issues connected with irregularities in bonus payments. This would give some day-to-day control over the scheme at shop floor level.

Once the union had decided to get involved in negotiating the scheme, it followed two important tactical principles. The first was that the operation of the scheme should be standardised across

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the different plants. This means that any changes to the scheme can only be negotiated nationally, and this will make it difficult for the management to play one moulded goods department off against others, as happened in East London.

The second point is that the relationship between pay and intensity of the moulders' work was tackled by challenging the production targets or required "performance levels". The union went into the negotiations with the objective of reducing the targets by 25%. They eventually compromised at a 10% reduction. Effectively, this means that all times for jobs are increased by 10%. This is a much faster way of changing the effort/pay relationship than negotiating each job time through the shop stewards' committee, which would have been very slow and technical, and may not have led to any improvements.

At the time of writing, it is difficult to assess the results of this strategy of engagement with the bonus scheme from the point of view of the moulders. The main improvement is that since targets are lower, disciplinary warnings for performance will be less frequent. Older or inexperienced moulders in the company are therefore slightly more secure in their jobs than before. Also, high earners on the scheme can vary their output more from week to week without fear of reprisals from management.

The changes in the scheme seem not to have affected productivity in the company. The new rules for targets mean that most moulders will therefore earn more for their effort, but their average level of effort remains very high. This raises the issue of incentive schemes in a setting where basic wages are still low. The cost to the moulders at Everite of working less hours, or working less hard, is financially high because bonus earnings, although not very high in absolute terms, are a substantial proportion of weekly earnings. The management is able to get a large increase in output for a relatively small cost in terms of the wage bill. Until basic rates are much higher, union participation in work study and incentive payment schemes will continue to have only limited effects on the intensity of their members' work. However, the union has made an important gain at Everite by opening up the possibility of further negotiations over targets and bonus rates, which may begin to have a greater effect on the intensity of work.

# Deregulation

## A challenge for the labour movement

Willie Hofmeyr & Martin Nicol

In September 1986, the government rushed through parliament a new act which poses dangerous threats to the trade union movement and to unorganized workers. The act gives the State President the power to cancel health regulations at factories, reduce minimum wages and lengthen working hours. There is no certainty that he will do any of this, but he now has the power and unions need to anticipate how he will use it.

The act (1) is supposed to promote "deregulation", which the government and capital say will aid small business, promote free enterprise and increase prosperity and employment opportunities. In the last year, even before the act was passed, we have some examples of what "deregulation" can mean.

### More complicated rules; but they apply to fewer people

New Wage Board determinations exempt certain businesses from following the minimum wage clauses. In the Commercial Distributive Trade, for example, shops that employ fewer than five workers can pay as low as they like. A new business, whether it has ten workers in a tiny shop or one thousand in a hypermarket, can ignore minimum wages in the first year of operation. In the second year, it can pay ten per cent below the wage determination minimum. Only in the third year does it have to meet the meagre minimum wages set by the Wage Board. (2) Similar clauses apply in the latest Hotel & Liquor, Catering, Security Services and Goods Transportation wage determinations. (3)

Under the industrial council system, deregulation has taken a new and ominous form in the Transvaal knitting industry. Ninety per cent of workers in the industry are union members and the industrial agreement has in the past been extended, by the Minister of Manpower, to apply to all knitting factories in the area, even when these were not parties to the industrial council. The industry-wide minimum wage prevented under-cutting by unscrupulous employers. Workers wages were not high - but at least there was a



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minimum to protect workers against super-exploitation. Now the Minister has refused to extend the agreement to non-parties. Although most workers belong to the union, most employers do not belong to the industrial council for the knitting industry. They are now exempt from the agreement and can pay as low as they like.

Some industrial councils have expressed the fear that the Minister may begin to refuse to extend agreements in other industries. (4) In the stevedoring trade, the company SA Stevedores Ltd and the Transport & General Workers' Union account for eighty per cent of the workforce. Nevertheless, the Minister refused to guarantee that if they formed an industrial council, the scope of the agreement would be extended to cover the smaller firms which now undercut the wage levels that organised workers have won. The moves towards a council followed the refusal of the Minister to gazette the 1985 wage agreement as a wage order under the Labour Relations Act.

Deregulation steps, in another guise, have also been taken under MOSA, the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act which covers health and safety issues in factories. (5) Most of the health and safety rules for factories are in regulations that are made by the Minister. These are rules about the number of toilets, protective clothing, safety measures for machines etc. Since 1983, the government has begun to revise the regulations as some of them are very old, even dating back to the 1940's. Most people thought that this would mean that the regulations would become better. But instead, many of the regulations have been made worse. Even so, management has still objected to some of the new regulations - they want the regulations to be even worse. (6)

The result has been to delay the new regulations. Only two unimportant regulations have, so far, become law. Almost all the regulations that give any substantial rights to workers have been delayed for a long time. These include the noise and asbestos regulations which are particularly important as there are no laws covering these areas at the moment. Revised regulations, that cover rights that workers already have, have come under attack. Many of the proposed new regulations dealing with, for example, breaks when doing hot work, when there must be showers, how many toilets must be provided, are worse than the old regulations. Despite this, some of them have now been delayed for over three years because the bosses say that they are still too good for the workers.

Another way in which deregulation has happened is by the changing of administrative practice. For example, the Workmen's Compensation Commissioner used to compensate all disabled workers with a pension. The classification of disability has now been changed and workers with a small degree of disability only receive a lump sum instead of a pension. In this way the value of the compensation was reduced considerably, but it was done in such a way that it is difficult to protest against it. In fact only a few people dealing with compensation were even aware of the change. (7)

### An Act with a long name - and a long arm

The new law is called the Temporary Removal of Restrictions on Economic Activity Act (Act 87/1986), but we shall just call it the Deregulation Act. It allows the State President to suspend the operation of a wide range of laws if he thinks that the particular law "unduly impedes" competition, the creation of job opportunities or the "economic progress" of people in any industry or occupation.

The president's powers apply to all laws, ie. it includes Acts of Parliament, regulations by the president, municipal by-laws, Industrial Council agreements, etc. In most cases the President has absolute power to suspend a law - he merely has to publish the suspension in the Government Gazette. The only legal protection is in the case of Acts and of laws dealing with certain industrial relations issues.

### **Acts of parliament:**

- (i) The president can only suspend those parts of the Act that deal with any of the matters listed in the Schedule.  
(s1(2(a)) see below) If the Act does not deal with any of the issues, the President cannot suspend it.
- (ii) Before the president can deregulate, the proposal must be advertised in the Government Gazette. Interested people will be allowed to give evidence on the issue before a Standing Committee in Parliament. If the standing committee changes the proposal, however, it is not necessary to advertise again and there will not be another chance to give evidence.  
(s1(5))
- (iii) The president must act on the advice of the Standing Committee. (s1(2(b))) This means that he cannot implement the proposal if the Committee disagrees with it.

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Part II issues (dealing with industrial relations)

These issues are listed in Part II of the Schedule. (8) They are:

- the registration of workers
- the registration of and control over factories
- the regulation of conditions of service and working hours
- the supervision and control of machines
- the protection of the health and safety of workers

When the President wants to deregulate any law dealing with these matters, the same safeguards apply as in the case of Acts. There are also two further safeguards:

- (i) The standing committee must consult with the Minister of Manpower before it makes a recommendation. It is doubtful that this will be much protection for workers.
- (ii) A more important protection is that the actions of the president will not affect existing contracts of employment, eg. employers cannot reduce the wages of workers already employed. (s1(3)) But in the case of wages this is not much protection when there is high inflation, because the employer will not have to give increases when the legal minimum wage is increased in the future.

A new ideology - out with apartheid, in with low wages

The Deregulation Act gives the government extremely wide powers to intervene in the economy. There is every reason to believe that this intervention will weaken, and not strengthen, the bargaining power and economic position of workers. Deregulation is part of a new future the ruling class is planning for its ideal "post apartheid" society.

Over the last few years South African society has been in a crisis at a number of levels. There has been a growing economic crisis with a high level of inflation and massive unemployment. This crisis has interacted with a major political crisis. All over the country townships are in revolt while the government finds itself increasingly unable to rule in the way that it wants to. By the early 1980s it was clear to certain people in big business and the government that the old apartheid economy based on legislated racism was simply not working any more. For the last few years they have been searching for a new policy which can replace



"outmoded" apartheid, but which will not threaten their privileges.

At the moment the government seems confused and unclear about where it is heading, but one must not fall into the trap of thinking that it does not have any policy at all. There are important areas in which a clear new policy is emerging, for example in the field of economics. Both big business and the government now agree that free enterprise is the solution to their problems. Every day the press is full of stories about free enterprise, deregulation, privatisation, promoting small business, etc. The recent conference between Botha and big business was totally dominated by these ideas. What all this means in practice, is that the government and big business want to cancel most laws that are based on race and replace them with the "natural" laws of economics that rule a free enterprise economy.

An excellent example of this new policy is the way that the pass laws were abolished. When the old laws could no longer work because of popular resistance, they were abolished with much fanfare. But this did not mean that people are now free to come and live in the towns. The government, with the support of big business, has adopted a policy of so-called "orderly urbanisation." People will be able to come to towns even when there are no houses and they will be allowed to squat in certain areas. But these site and service schemes will be expensive. Those who come to live in the urban areas will have to pay an "economic" price for the sites and services they receive. In this way the government will not have to stop people directly from coming to town. The "free market" will do the dirty work by making it too expensive for many people who do not have jobs to live in the towns. The Slums Act and other laws that are not directly racist will be used against people who cannot afford to pay for sites and services. (9)

Of course the government is not prepared to rely only on the "free market". Those people who do come to live in the towns, will also be well controlled. In Khayalitsha, for example, the squatter areas are surrounded by barbed wire, they are lit by floodlights at night, and the rows of shacks are kept apart so that police vehicles can get into the area without problems. Also the government is now using the non-racist Aliens Act to deport people who are supposedly citizens of the independent states. This has already been used against NUM officials who were legally citizens of the Transkei.

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But it is wrong to dismiss the reforms as meaningless and to argue that nothing has changed. It is quite true that the government is trying to limit the reforms and to retain as much control as possible. but at the same time many people have benefitted from the abolition of the pass laws. In the abolition of the pass laws as with other reforms, the strategy of the government is to create as many divisions as possible - both between the working class and the middle class, and within the working class itself.

Deregulation as an economic strategy is also an important part of this political strategy. Its aim, according to the government official in charge, is "to allow small business and informal sector developments to take off." (10) In other words deregulation is intended mainly to benefit small business, and particularly the so-called informal sector which is mainly black. The government and big business hope that this will help to develop a black middle class which will see capitalism as the best solution for South Africa. They see this as a vital part of their plans to ensure the survival of capitalism in the region.

#### Effects on the labour movement: chaos and division

We also need to look at the concrete effects of these changes for the labour movement. The new economic strategy is not only trying to solve the problems of apartheid. It is also trying to deal with the important gains made by the unions over the last 10 years and to reverse or contain these gains. At the very least they want to prevent the extension of these gains to the unorganised.

Firstly it is clear from what we said above, that the unions will face chaos in the labour field. For example, when organising in a new factory it is often very important to find out the minimum wages and working conditions that apply. This is already a difficult task as these conditions are laid down in a number of laws and regulations. There are also many exemptions and they are seldom available in consolidated form. For example, if one looks at the case of shopworkers which was mentioned earlier. Before 1985 the minimum wage of a shopworker was settled if you knew the town where the shop was and the job the workers was doing. Now you also need to know how many workers there are in the shop and when the shop was started. In the Hotel trade the workers minimum wages can depend on the number of beds in the hotel on 11 July 1986. How is anyone supposed to find this out?

At least these rules are in the particular wage agreement. Under the Deregulation Act the situation will become even worse than this example, because further exemptions will be given. You may find out how many beds a hotel had on 11 July 1986 and then discover the hotel has been completely exempted from the wage clause under the Deregulation Act.

A second problem is around central bargaining institutions like the Industrial Councils. As our examples of the knitting and stevedoring industries showed, there seems to be the beginning of a trend that such agreements will apply exclusively to the employers that form part of the bargaining process. At the moment this problem will not affect most unions, but it will become more serious once the unions become stronger and seek industry-wide wage agreements to underpin the plant level agreements. There are three reasons why this is important:

- (i) It will be easy for employers to withdraw from central bargaining if they are unhappy with the wage agreement and feel that they can negotiate lower wages in their own factory.
- (ii) Even when a particular industry is almost completely organised, it remains very difficult to organise all the small factories. Unless there is some way in which an agreement can be enforced in the whole industry, there is no way in which these unorganised workers can be protected. The existence of such unorganised workers with no minimum conditions will always undermine the position of the unions.
- (iii) The unions will also be affected by the withdrawal of legal protection in a number of other areas like health and safety. The older conservative unions were protected to some extent by the law (eg. industrial council agreements) against the operation of the "free market." The government and big business are keen to withdraw this protection now, before the newer radical unions grow strong enough to entrench this legal protection. In this sense the Deregulation Act is a very direct challenge to the labour movement.

#### Effects for the unorganised: worse conditions

Organised workers will probably be able to resist the deregulation in their particular factory. But deregulation will probably be ap-



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plied mainly in small firms and outlying areas where most of the workers are unorganised. These workers are not in a strong position to resist and clearly the main focus of deregulation will be to worsen the conditions of the unorganised. We can expect a serious attempt to implement the free market dream of some capitalists that they should have the freedom to exploit workers as much as they desire. These capitalists often say that there is no unemployment problem in South African - the only problem is that workers are not prepared to work for a low enough wage.

Another problem is that it is already difficult to organise in these areas, and deregulation will make it even more difficult. Thus in the long term it will weaken the union movement as a whole. Of course, any attack on the unorganised will also affect organised workers because employers will fear that their products will be undercut by cheaper unorganised labour elsewhere. Thus they will resist more strongly any attempts to improve working conditions in organised industries. This will especially affect the more competitive and labour intensive industries like clothing.

#### A New strategy is needed for the union movement

Hard economic times, political unrest and the lack of confidence in the future have focused the attention of business and the state on the need to prepare for a "post-apartheid economy". Small business, deregulation, privatisation and free enterprise are the slogans they are now pinning meanings onto. As we have shown, this is not merely an ideological shift, it is having real effects on workers and on the terrain on which unions operate. The bosses are doing all in their power to ensure that it is their free enterprise plan that is followed in building an economy that offers an alternative to apartheid - and not the socialist plan envisaged by the progressive trade union movement. As Zac de Beer, the Anglo American director who met the ANC, said: "We must not allow the baby of free enterprise to be thrown out with the bathwater of Apartheid". (11) The bosses' post-apartheid plan is growing and changing every day. The workers' movement cannot afford to wait for liberation before fighting for its socialist plan. It needs to carry on the struggle now.

We need to root out unproductive Apartheid bureaucracy. We need fewer laws and we need simpler rules - rules that can be understood without lawyers. But this is not the way deregulation is

currently being applied. The Deregulation Act allows the president to undermine existing laws and make them more complicated - in the name of small business, free enterprise or whatever. The unions need to push for a different way of tackling the problem of cumbersome legislation and red tape. This would be based on clear and consistent rules, properly enforced. So everyone knows where they stand. Rather than the present effort to undermine and remove basic standards by granting arbitrary and piecemeal exemptions.

The union movement needs to put forward its own position on how the Wage Act, Labour Relations Act, Machinery and Occupational Safety Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the industrial council system should be revised. The Deregulation Act attacks all of these. And in a way that plant-based union organisation will find very hard to respond to effectively. Deregulation will first attack weak points where there is no organisation. Its successes will begin to harm, and weaken, organised factories and sectors.

Despite the great growth of the trade union movement in the last ten years and the enormous influence unions have come to wield in many factories, the government has had no hesitation in passing the MOSA Act, the Workmens' Compensation Act and now the Deregulation Act, all of which have elements that can be used against workers' interests. It seems that formal objections to virtually all efforts at deregulation in the labour sphere will have to be submitted through a parliamentary standing committee. This is one new forum in which unions will have to consider an intervention. But the need is still for a "national strategy" to allow the unions now an effective and planned influence over the laws and administrative practices that govern the labour field.

#### Footnotes

1. Temporary Removal of Restrictions on Economic Activity Act No. 87 of 1986; Government Gazette No.10422, 10 September 1986
2. Saldru, Quarterly Bulletin 4/1985; Government Gazette 9998
3. See SALB 12.1, 1986; Saldru, Quarterly Bulletin 2/1986; Government Gazettes 10341, 10297, 10488
4. For example, in the building industry. See SA Builder May 1986, p 15
5. This section draws on the Industrial Health Research Group memorandum: "New legal challenges by state to union movement", July 1986

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6. See "Briefing on factory regulations" by Industrial Health Research Group (forthcoming) for details
7. See the article by the Industrial Health Research Group in SALB 11.2, 1985 and the reply by the Workmens' Compensation Commissioner in SALB 11.5, 1986
8. The Schedule is included as an Appendix to this article
9. See SALB 11.8, 1986, special issue on "orderly urbanisation"
10. Business Day 21.7.87
11. The Spectator June 1986

APPENDIX:

Schedule

Part I

Matters with regard to:

- (a) the requirements for the registration and licensing of businesses, undertakings, industries, trades and occupations, and the employment or use of land and premises for the carrying on or exercising thereof;
- (b) health requirements with which premises and buildings on or in which activities contemplated in paragraph(a) are carried on, must comply;
- (c) the prohibition or regulation of, or restriction on, the erection of dwellings, buildings and other structures;
- (d) the conveyance of persons and goods within, from and to a specified area;
- (e) the establishment of towns and town planning;
- (f) the days on which and the times when business may be done.

Part II

Matters with regard to:

- (a) the registration of employees;
- (b) the registration of and control over factories;
- (c) the regulation of conditions of service and working hours;
- (d) the supervision of and use of machines;
- (e) the protection of the health and safety of employees.



# Organising local authority workers

Coletane Markham

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Local administration has grown along with other state departments into an immense organisation, consuming a large proportion of the national budget and employing literally thousands of people. Central Statistical Services figures for 1986, for example, indicate that the total number of people presently employed within the local authorities sector presently stands at 263,000 of whom more than 138,000 are blacks. The public sector also presently stands as the largest employer as a whole outside of domestic, agricultural and farm labour. The Institute of Race Relations figures for June 1985 put the numbers of people employed throughout this sector at 1,413,892 as opposed to 1,346,300 in manufacturing and 755,712 in trade and catering. COSATU's decision to organise the public sector therefore potentially opens the space for tremendous growth in the number of organised workers.

The potential role of the public sector unions also begins to focus attention on the nature of the state, or state-linked corporations as an employer. Yet surprisingly little is known about this. In the following article the problems involved in organising local authority workers will be studied. The article focusses on the area around Johannesburg in the period 1980 to 1986 with the hope that some of the processes which begin to be uncovered will aid our understanding of the mechanisms by which employers neutralise and disrupt the workforce, in an attempt to stem militancy from within this strategic sector. The question of what power local authority workers potentially hold also begins to be addressed.

Of the three tiers of government (national, regional and local) the area of greatest autonomy with regard to labour relations exists at the local level, although there is definite consistency with regard to central policy decisions. The definition of "local authority" may sometimes be confusing. There are basically three types of local authorities which provide various services including:

Health, refuse removal, sewerage, etc.

Parks and recreational facilities

Security

Water supply

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Electricity

Protection services, such as fire-fighting, ambulance services,  
Traffic control

Passenger transport

The various local authorities which have provided these services (not always all) include municipalities or city councils, the previous administration boards - now undertaken by town or community councils, and in some cases regional water boards. Provision of local services are now also undertaken by various "homelands".

Local authority workers, unlike central state employees, are included in the provisions of the Labour Relations Act, meaning that they have access to conciliation board machinery. However because the work which they carry out is defined as part of the "essential services" they are denied the right to strike. Section 46 of the Act tries to redress this situation somewhat by providing for compulsory arbitration in the event of any dispute. Nevertheless this provision can still be easily exploited by employers in the sense that the whole process of attending to immediate worker grievances may be delayed. In addition because the large majority of local authority workers are migrants, employers have often resorted to immediate mass dismissal in the event of a work stoppage. This has happened in many recent cases: the stoppage at Potchestroom municipality in 1985, and in a number of stoppages in 1986 notably Empangeni, Richards Bay, Tembisa, Kagiso, Thokoza, and so on. Perhaps the most dramatic instance of this kind of response occurred in the 1980 Johannesburg Municipal workers strike where more than 1,000 workers were forcibly deported back to their various "homelands". Employers have also been able to exploit the massive unemployment problem in these areas to find easy replacements for dismissed workers.

Unionists trying to organise local authority workers find not only the legal prohibition on the right to strike a major problem, but also the dispersed nature of work sites, the small gangs of workers at such site, close supervision, and conservative employers some of their most difficult obstacles. The fact that many workers are housed in local authority owned hostels, under armed guard, is a further obstacle as unauthorised access is denied. This means that unless the union is officially granted recognition rights, or limited access rights, access to the workforce can become particularly difficult. Up until now most of the unions organising local authority workers in the Johannesburg area have

not obtained registration and have on this basis been denied such rights. Municipal and General Workers Union (MGWUSA) officials interviewed expressed their problems as follows:

We can't go in and see workers, our members, where they stay and we can't go and visit them, unless they come to our offices. If we are caught talking to workers during lunch-times we may be arrested". (1)

Employers have complicated the problem of access by creating various in-house (or "sweetheart") unions and concluding closed-shop agreements with these unions at Industrial Council level.

The state realises the strategic significance, politically and otherwise, of workers within this sector, thus an elaborate and complex system of dividing the workforce has been developed. Bargaining machinery is highly fragmented, meaning that union gains in any one area or region cannot easily be extended to other regions. Wage determinations for unskilled workers, for example, exclude a number of crucial towns and cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria. Industrial councils where bargaining around wages and working conditions takes place are also fragmented. This makes negotiation on a sector basis impossible. Cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town have their own industrial councils. On the other hand the industrial council for the Transvaal Municipal Undertaking excludes certain towns like Secunda and Pretoria as well as all black local authorities.

Where industrial councils do exist these bodies exhibit various degrees of flexibility as far as bargaining with "outside" (ie: not the employer created in-house) unions is concerned. MGWUSA, Transport and General Workers Union, and South African Black Municipal and Allied Workers Union, all indicate that greater flexibility exists in the Transvaal towns which form part of the Transvaal Municipal Undertaking. The unions report that some form of bargaining has already occurred at a number of Transvaal towns. TGWU has concluded a recognition agreement at Secunda and at a number of Natal towns. The union also reports that it has majority representation at Springs, Brits and Diepmeadow and will be seeking recognition at these places. Recently TGWU also went into the industrial council for the Johannesburg Municipal Undertaking and has gained a limited access agreement there. MGWUSA claims that negotiations with the Krugersdorp municipality occurred during 1985. Talks deadlocked however after the municipality refused to sign a declaration undertaking not to victimise union members. At



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present recognition rights at Krugersdorp are still being sought. SABMAWU claims that recognition rights have been sought at Randfontein, Kempton Park and Vanderbijlpark and that some form of bargaining has already occurred at these places.

An employer like the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) however exhibits outright hostility towards any outside unions. The closed shop agreement with a number of in-house unions has historically prevented unions from making much in-road here. In addition the JCC insists that unions be part of the Industrial Council first before any negotiations take place. In order to do this unions firstly had to show representation and be registered. Representation on the other hand was particularly difficult to show. The "conditions of service" concluded at industrial council level automatically forces all JCC employees to belong to one or more of the unions represented on that body. By virtue of this all the JCC employees automatically belong to the various in-house unions without these unions having to recruit at all. In order to understand how this situation came to develop, the suppression of the 1980 Johannesburg Municipal workers strike and employer strategy pursued since then must be studied. What emerges clearly is that employers' ability to prevent the spread of progressive unionisation amongst the workforce during that time contributed to the years of difficulty experienced thereafter.

### The 1980 municipal workers strike

The 1980 strike in many ways posed some of the essential problems faced by unions trying to organise local authority workers. These have already been dealt with elsewhere. (see articles in SALB 6.7, 1981) This section will merely recap some of the most significant factors which emerged then. The pre-history to the strike is also important as black workers up until 1979 had only employer created liaison committees to represent them. This liaison committee was for the "graded staff" only, thereby excluding the majority of unskilled black workers from any form of representation. For so-called Coloured workers a separate workers union dating back to 1961 existed. As a direct result of the 1979 Wiehahn proposals employers at the JCC openly went about the process of trying to turn the existant liaison committee into a union for black workers. The JCC's willingness to create such a union must be seen in the context of the period, the growth of independent progressive unions since 1973 and general unrest in the country during that time. The black in-house union was therefore a clear attempt to

keep the more militant independent unions away. This union, to be called the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers (UJMW), was formed with the help of existing liaison committee members. According to Jeremy Keenan, at the time of its formation the liaison committee members, 50% of whom were council nominated, were given paid leave to organise the new union. They were given free access to all the compounds and workplaces, and even made use of council stationery. At the same time workers in the transport department were going about forming a representative union of their own. This union was to become the Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU). These workers had formed independent "works committees" which represented a direct threat to the UJMW.

At the inaugural launch of the UJMW on January 23 1980 almost all 3,000 workers present walked out in protest. It was estimated at the time that only 113 workers remained behind to adopt the constitution and elect the executive committee. Of these only 59 actually voted, the other 54 abstained. Keenan reports that when the UJMW was granted provisional registration six months later there were only 40 paid up members. The works committees on the other hand formed the backbone of the BMWU, which was to become the leading force during the strike.

### The strike

On July 24 1980, 600 workers at the Orlando Power Station stopped work demanding wage increases. Management's response on the day of the stoppage was to demand that workers send forward their representatives. Apparently a 22-man "workers action committee" was immediately elected to negotiate around their demands. Negotiations deadlocked after an hour during which time all demands put forward by the workers were refused. Thereafter workers were told to go back to work or face dismissal. It appears that these workers were subsequently fired/locked out of the compound. By the 29th more than 10,000 workers from all departments had joined the strike. The wage increase and recognition of the BMWU emerged as two central demands. Management responded by bringing in scabs (white schoolchildren) and calling the police. Many workers were locked in to the compounds thereby preventing them from gathering together and isolating the leadership from the members. By July 31 more than 1,000 workers were forcibly deported, 280 Venda recruits were on their way to replace some of these workers, and the strike "leaders" had been charged under the Sabotage Act. The remaining workers were forced to find their own way home, many hung around



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Johannesburg seeking other employment. Conditions in the "homelands" forced many back to work for the JCC again. The union on the other hand found itself unable to help workers as the period after the strike was taken up with trying to secure the release of the leaders. At the time the BMWU was clearly unprepared organisationally and in terms of resources for a strike within the sector. The union was only one month old and although it claimed representation amongst the majority of the workforce only 900 members had formally signed up.

### Employer response

Throughout the strike the JCC consistently refused to negotiate with the BMWU on the basis that it was an unregistered union. The UJMW, which was also not registered at the time however received a more favourable response. Management's attempts to undermine the union by requesting separate negotiation with workers in each department was met with general derision. The workers generally refused to elect any representatives, insisting that the union was their representative. Management also tried to undermine the strike through spreading contradictory stories to the press, and deliberately underplaying the numbers of workers actually out on strike. Today this kind of response can still clearly be seen, the SATS strike once again reflects a similar pattern.

The employers' ability to smash the strike by simply deporting, or alternatively mass dismissal of migrants remains one of the key problems faced by local authority (and other) workers to this day. Whereas union organisers had managed to overcome rural-urban divides at the workplace the problem of formulating an adequate response to mass dismissal nevertheless remains. The other major problem was employers' ability to exploit the large reserve army of labour and find easy replacements, particularly in the homelands, for the fired workers. The municipality's close links with other state departments, their ability to mobilise civilians (white) and the Police and Defence force to help break the strike remained another problem. Other government departments played a major role in sending in replacements, which raises the question of appropriate solidarity action amongst all "public sector" workers.

Perhaps the most important lesson learnt during the strike however was the need for unions to extend strike action within this sector beyond localised areas in order to put sufficient pressure on their employers. It became particularly clear that far greater



power was needed if employers and the state were to be challenged effectively. In order to command this kind of power the Johannesburg workers needed to (i) extend organisational links beyond Johannesburg, (ii) develop strong solidarity links with community groups and other unions, (iii) deal with the problem of in-house unions in a consistent and organised manner. The in-house unions played no small role in undermining the strike, and the employers response at the time clearly indicates that the motivation was mainly to buy time for the UJMW to consolidate itself.

### The in-house unions

The in-house unions, the UJMW for "black" workers and the Johannesburg Municipal Combined (formerly Coloured) Employees Union (JMCEU), play a major role in the Municipality's overall system of control. This it is argued stems partly from the specific nature of the "production process" within the local authorities sector. There are no major technological advances, not on the same scale at any rate, which might facilitate employer control at the workplace. The "unskilled" nature of much of the work done provides for a dangerously high level of homogeneity within the workforce. This is exacerbated by worker concentration at the compounds, where a shared experience of exploitation easily takes root. Due to these factors a more overt system of control is needed. The notable presence of supervisors, the need for tame unions, a high level of repression at the compounds, etc, all form part of this system of control.

There are also "political" forms of control and once again the role of the in-house unions in this process is clearly important. The reproduction of capitalist enterprise, which is the major reason for the existence of the state sector, requires not only the reproduction of services needed to maintain capital and wage labour (economically, politically, and ideologically) but also the reproduction of a compatible racial-capitalist state apparatus. The people who actually staff the state apparatus are of vital importance. It is in this sense that a strike within this sector is most threatening; administrative structures must include a mechanism whereby the staffing of the state apparatus ensures a compliant and loyal workforce. When this begins to be challenged, when there is a breakdown in the state administration itself the political consequences are tremendous. For this reason the upper echelons of the civil and local state apparatus have historically been strictly preserved for "whites". Recent reforms however have

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seen changes particularly at local state level, the twin rationalisation-job differentiation package introduced in 1984 for example is designed to increase the numbers of blacks who are willing to play a role in local and civil state administration. (2) The proposed Regional Services Councils (RSCs) tries to take these reforms, deracialisation of administrative tasks insofar as bulk service provision is concerned, at local level, even further. In this sense any expansion of the state administration, particularly when increasing numbers from the oppressed classes themselves are drawn in, heightens the potential political significance of state sector workers.

The question of how compliance is maintained must therefore be addressed. In the case of the JMCEU at least, one writer has noted that (i) the majority of the union's leadership occupy managerial positions at the JCC, (ii) there is almost no organic link between the union executive and the broader membership. These unions have no shop floor structures, in fact they don't even need to recruit members. The writer noted that leadership are lured away from the membership through benefits, job mobility, and their close association with employers. Support for this leadership comes from the "white-collar" clerical and administrative staff who are reasonably secure in their jobs, are satisfied with salaries, and are more interested in the various benefits (insurance schemes, house improvement loans, etc) which the union can offer. (3) Marcel Golding, writing on the civil service noted similar strategies:

Co-option strategies [are] directed at the permanent officials who are vital to the state and play an important function in the implementation of the New Deal. The material incentives that are offered, ensured functional civil apparatus in the face of enormous opposition by the oppressed classes. On the other hand a divisive, disorganising and discriminatory employment strategy is pursued with regard to the temporary workers in order to stifle united action. (4)

These processes are perhaps more visible in the newly created black local authority structures. At the JMCEU 1985 AGM the General-Secretary noting the creation of separate local authorities for each racial group as part of the "new" dispensation noted:

The main aim of this dispensation is to grant the various race groups a greater say and power over decision making in their local affairs. We shall therefore examine how

this measure will affect us as employees of local government in employment and promotion... We can now demand that preference of employment be given to our members to serve their own communities". (5)

Nevertheless it is clear that as a direct result of the 1980 strike many members in these unions began a process of questioning of their own leadership. These workers were objectively able to identify with the BMWU. In the case of the JMCEU the role played by leadership, the fact that members in the housing department actually scabbed, began a four year struggle by a number of mainly "blue-collar" workers for democratic control of the union. The reform group, as they called themselves, however failed due to lack of experience, insufficient mobilisation, and the very structure of annual AGM meetings, which is the only time membership actually come together en masse. (6) Formalistic procedures and despotic control by the chairperson, according to this group, prevented them from successfully ousting the leadership. These events highlight the very fragile base of these in-house unions. A consistent and organised strategy directed at the membership may quickly lead to their downfall.

#### The period after 1980

One of the unfortunate effects of the strike was that it allowed employers and the various in-house unions time to strengthen their position in relation to any "outside" unions. The UJMW and the JMCEU together with ten other unions of which four are in-house unions for "white" municipal workers, were incorporated into the industrial council for the Johannesburg Municipal Undertaking on a closed-shop basis. This effectively meant that these two unions would be the only officially recognised representatives for all the JCC's black employees. The workforce was further divided on a racial basis, all "Coloured" workers automatically belonging to the JMCEU, all "black" workers automatically part of the UJMW. This made access to the workers for unions standing outside of this forum very difficult. In order to prove representivity, which was necessary in order to challenge the system, independent unions would have to require members to formally resign from these unions as soon as they signed up. This was difficult to do in view of workers fear of victimisation.

Even where a union was able to gain members the union could never represent such workers at departmental disciplinary enquiries, the



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usual forum where individual grievances are handled. At best the union could write a letter to the Staff Board on a members behalf, requesting that an enquiry be held and then assisting the worker in terms of formulating his/her grievance. Given this situation many workers, whilst actually belonging to unions TGWU or MGWUSA, actually continued to use in-house unions at such proceedings.

Nevertheless the period since 1980 has seen the growing consolidation of independent progressive unions organising local authority workers. Up until now this has taken the form of a slow process of recruiting and training membership. In this sense the unions organising in this sector are still lagging way behind the private sector unions, such as metal, textiles, chemicals, mining, and so forth in terms of gaining recognition rights or any negotiation around substantive issues. This situation was only beginning to change, particularly with regard to the JCC, in 1986/7.

As a result of the difficulties experienced unions organising independently of the JCC resorted to establishing "departmental works committees" along the same lines as those which existed prior to the strike. The works committee would be part of the union, and would recruit members on the union's behalf. These works committees would represent general grievances at the level of each department. The union which made most use of this tactic was the TGWU. Subjects listed for committee discussion in terms of the constitution include hygiene and working conditions, output and productivity, conditions of employment and benefits, safety, employee services (health schemes and transport) and disciplinary procedures. The benefits of organising along the committee system according to TGWU is that it created a space for the union to penetrate the system at precisely the point where the in-house unions were weakest (the shop floor) and also trained committee members in democratic worker representation. A union like MGWUSA did not use this system but formed committees at the compounds where possible. These compound committees recruited members and popularised the union. MGWUSA had no way of representing members other than those mentioned earlier.

A further union, SABMAWU, has tended to stay out of the JCC area altogether. This union's strategy has been to organise all the surrounding municipalities and black local authorities with the view to consolidating a power base there first, before the tough JCC employers could be taken on. In general SABMAWU's stance has been a lot more militant. The union is almost solely responsible for a rash of strikes amongst local authority workers on the Rand

since 1985. All of these strikes have been "illegal". The union now claims that they have begun to organise JCC workers and that they are seriously considering applying for recognition and also registration. Like MGWUSA, SABMAWU has remained unregistered. The following section will evaluate each of these unions in greater detail. What becomes clear in the separate paths pursued by each since 1980 is that a whole record of struggle relating to the problem of organising local authority workers has built up. Union weaknesses up until now have naturally also become clearer.

### MGWUSA

In 1981 the BMWU split into two factions, the breakaway group went on to form SABMAWU, whilst those remaining with Joe Mavi and Gatsby Mazwi (two of the leaders in the 1980 strike) eventually formed the Municipal and General Workers union of South Africa. It appears that the reason for the split related to union finances. There were also ideological tensions between the two factions; by 1983 these positions had become solidified. MGWUSA closely identified with a non-racial position and was one of the first unions to join the UDF. SABMAWU however retained the black consciousness tradition which had been present since the beginning of BMWU, and eventually went into the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). MGWUSA has recently merged with Municipal Workers Union, largely Natal-based, in preparation for the move towards one national local authorities union within COSATU. The new union - Municipal Workers Union of South Africa - claims to have a membership of more than 10,000 nationally and to have set up branches in various parts of the country. Exact membership figures are difficult to ascertain however because of the recent merger and because there have never been stop-order facilities. In the Johannesburg area MGWUSA claims to have members at Soweto Dobsonville, Krugersdorp, and the JCC.

Thus far MGWUSA has not been able to effectively represent members at any local authority. The union organiser says that besides committees set up at compounds insofar as the JCC is concerned there is no further contact with members. Members are forced to visit head-office or alternatively they may attend seminars organised by the union at various venues. Progress went further at the Krugersdorp municipality; but no recognition rights exist yet.

### TGWU

The Transport and General Workers Union has possibly made the



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furthest in-roads into organising and gaining access to the JCC workforce. Historically the core members of this union were part of a group of workers from the JCC who approached the Industrial Aid Society in 1978 over retrenchments. These workers were later incorporated into the FOSATU Workers Project and thereafter became TGWU members. In the period 1978 to 1986 the union has managed to train workers in democratic worker representation, it has set up a core following and presence on the shop floor through the departmental works committees. The union has also gone furthest in terms of gaining recognition rights, particularly in the Natal region. They claim that besides the JCC there are also members at Brits, Secunda, Springs and Diepmeadow. Thus far the union has concentrated on organising the JCC workers.

TGWU has up until now been a general union, defining itself initially as a "service sector" union. The result is that TGWU has members in the Transport, Construction, Local Authority, and Security sectors. Of these the total number of local authority workers, according to the union number about 9,000 nationally. At the JCC the union now has membership of roughly 1,800 of the total black workforce of roughly 14,000. The union is strongest in Natal where the local authority component numbers about 5,000 of the 9,000 workers organised.

The union has a clear policy towards recognition agreements, believing that these should be sought as far as possible, after a particular local authority has been well organised. There is also a strong tradition of building up shop floor structures and developing a well trained worker leadership. The union shop steward structures operate on a departmental basis, organisers try to ensure a departmental spread. These shop stewards then form a negotiating committee to negotiate with management before and after recognition is achieved. Because of the diverse conditions surrounding negotiation at each local authority the union follows a policy of selecting and organising per local authority. "It is important that members win demands on a local basis first, because this is a way of mobilising and drawing in membership", says the union General Secretary. Ultimately the union would like to negotiate on a sector or regional basis, whilst ensuring that power at the local level is not compromised. The unions are a long way away from this however, first they must consolidate into one strong national union.

TGWU believes that a strike should be the last resort, that a



union should try to strengthen its status with a particular local authority first. This is because of the vulnerability of the workforce in this sector. Localised action is likely to lead to mass dismissal or deportation. Mass dismissals, according to the General Secretary, "greatly weaken the union, even if one does win reinstatement thereafter, which is highly unlikely. The union's capacity to win the demands that led to the strike in the first place will simply be lessened". In the last six years TGWU has only had three strikes in this sector, all of which led to dismissal

Nevertheless the union sees these years as having brought many gains for the workers in spite of the limitations. Housing committees have been set up at compounds which have solved many grievances. The union organiser says that faction fights, drunkenness, and general fighting have been curbed where these committees are strong. One of the union's achievements has been the right for sick workers to summon wives or children to look after them in the event of illness or death. The JCC has now provided accommodation for these purposes. The union has also managed to set up "safety committees" at some depots which have seen various improvements in working conditions. The JCC now provides covers for trucks transporting workers to and from worksites, also workers now receive raincoats, and other improvements have definitely come as a result of this. The union sees even further gains now that they have joined the industrial council.

#### SABMAWU

SABMAWU defines itself broadly as a "state sector" union believing that this is one way in which divisions perpetuated by the state can be overcome. At present the union claims to have membership of over 35,000 although there are also no stop-order facilities and the local authorities component cannot be specified. Branches have been set up all along the Rand, including the Far East Rand region, the East Rand (where the union claims to be strongest), the West Rand areas, the Western Transvaal, and also a JCC branch. The union says that branches in Natal have been lost to NUPS (National Union of Public Servants) or have subsided after they broke away from CUSA in 1985. SABMAWU, like NUM, broke from CUSA just before the formation of COSATU, but remains outside the new federation. The union has a history of militant struggle against local authorities in various areas around Johannesburg. A strike by 700 workers at the Potchefstroom municipality in 1985 resulted in mass arrests and dismissal of the entire workforce. This strike was put

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down with even greater brutality than the 1980 strike. (7) Since then the union has co-ordinated strikes at a number of black local authorities in 1986 including Thokoza, Tembisa, Kagiso, Soweto, Kathlehong, and strikes by hospital workers such as at JG Strydom and Baragwanath.

SABMAWU's progress has developed in waves. At one time the union had a large membership, which declined drastically after the break with CUSA. At the time the union came away virtually bankrupt, the organiser was lost to CUSA and all contact with Natal broken. The recent growth in 1986 has come with the strikes. As such the union's strength, their ability to develop a consistent shop floor presence and negotiating skills remains to be tested. Thus far the union has successfully won reinstatement orders in a number of cases, using the Supreme Court rather than established industrial procedures. Most of these have been won at the black local authorities, raising the likelihood that the reasons for reinstatement were more often political than anything else. The one day strike at Thokoza, for example, was resolved after the Minister of Constitutional Development intervened personally. Explaining the reasons for this the union legal advisor said:

The reason for their response [reinstatement and acceding] to worker demands is probably more political - they didn't want the Council to collapse as happened in Tembisa. The state desperately needs to prove that the BLA-system works". (8)

SABMAWU's militancy has however tested the courts and employers in a number of ways. Legal loopholes, the resort to argument on the basis of common law rights, have been exposed. Employer ignorance, as in the case of Tembisa where reinstatement was achieved on the basis of a judgement declaring the dismissals "unlawful", has also been highlighted. In this case the local authority had failed to comply with the procedural rules for dismissal, which must be done on an individual basis, under the provisions of the Black Local Authorities Staff Relations in Government Gazette No. 2568 of 1983. The effect of the "unlawful dismissal" judgement however does not mean automatic reinstatement. In Tembisa the workers were eventually reinstated because of the inability to find scabs and in the context of generalised political crisis in the township. One of the effects of that particular strike was to result in a total breakdown of the whole local authority structure as the mayor eventually resigned and the community joined the union in pressurising the council. The Tembisa strike was of particular significance too in that the actual power of local authority workers, a



power which goes beyond simply disrupting "essential services" was raised in a real and practical manner. SABMAWU has definitely exposed the weak side of certain local authorities.

### Black local authorities

Although the Black Local Authorities (town, village councils) are presented by the state as being on an equal footing with any "white" local authority in the urban areas, the reality is vastly different. The state's refusal historically to subsidise the costs of reproduction of the black working class has seen this unfortunate task devolved onto the shoulders of the BLAs. But they face large areas to service, chronic housing and infrastructural shortages, and a weaker tax base. Not surprisingly the BLAs have experienced permanent fiscal crisis and the attendant ferocity of the community. The quality of services provided generally remains low, whilst BLAs have become more famous for their increasing reliance on repressive measures, most notably through the "blackjacks" (municipal policemen) to resolve the township crisis. Residents are expected to pay exorbitant rental and service rates whilst they believe that what little money there is is wasted on corruption by the councillors.

Within the BLAs employment practices with regard to the staff are extremely poor. Wages are usually lower, whilst forums to discuss or resolve worker grievances are largely absent. There are no industrial councils; the question of granting recognition rights to unions remains couched in uncertainty and confusion. Unions report that councillors seem unsure of the power they have in this regard. This became particularly clear in the Tembisa dispute where the Town Clerk responded to worker grievances by saying that he needed to consult "higher authorities" first. According to SABMAWU, management response to unions organising BLA workers has been characterised by rejection, refusal to discuss wages or working conditions, delaying tactics employed in addressing grievances, and so on. As a result the recent strikes have particularly occurred here. Over the last two years there have been spontaneous stoppages at Kathlehong, Diepmeadow, Soweto Town Council, Kagiso, Dobsonville, Thokoza, and Tembisa. Many of these workers have been members of SABMAWU.

The composition of the workforce indicates the central and growing importance of the "security" section, the blackjacks, now reinforced by the "kitskonstabels". These workers are a strategic part



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of the workforce both in terms of union organising and politically. Often they hold the key to unions' ability to gain access to the rest of the workforce. They guard compounds and workplaces, they are able to monitor the movement of all people entering or leaving council property. The policemen are also important politically as they have been deployed to guard the lives of discredited and unpopular councillors, or to put down unrest. Yet surprisingly it has often been the municipal policemen who have been at the spearhead of strikes over better wages and working conditions. This has been the case in virtually all of the recent strikes. The Kathlehong strike was particularly notable as policemen demonstrated a level of militancy unheard of before. The Sunday Star of 2.11.86 reported that 115 municipal policemen "went beserk" after they demanded a wage increase from R200 to R400 per month. In that particular case these policemen reportedly marched through the streets of the township and were subsequently detained under emergency regulations. What has become clear is that a space for organising the municipal policemen and other BLA workers clearly exists. This task may become more easy, ironically, as the state churns out badly trained, miserably exploited, instant cops. In the Tembisa dispute the workers went even further as they joined hands with the local community in questioning the entire local administration.

### The Tembisa strike

Workers at the Tembisa Town Council gathered at the administrative offices on May 19 1986 after they were informed that they would not be paid for heeding two stay-away calls by community groups on April 28 and May 14. The Town Clerk asked workers to elect representatives to discuss their grievances. Apparently seven delegates were immediately elected who then put forward a number of demands, including recognition of their union (SABMAWU), reinstatement of two colleagues dismissed earlier, no pay deductions for observing the stay-aways, dismissal of three white officials who were racist, and pay increased to R700 per month. The mayor responded by telling workers that a union for BLA workers already existed, the Transvaal Association for Employees of Black Local Authorities. Workers claim never to have heard of such a union. Regarding the other grievances the mayor reported that he would consult with authorities in Pretoria first. Workers subsequently gathered at the offices on the 20th, 23rd and 26th of that month. On the 23rd they were informed that a reply to their grievances would only be given on June 23. This was rejected, after which the council read out a general notice of dismissal of the entire workforce. By the 26th a

number of workers congregating outside the offices were teargassed by SADF members. Thereafter municipal policemen living on council premises were forcibly evicted and a large number of workers detained under Emergency regulations.

After three weeks it increasingly became clear that the community were rallying in support of the workers. A Workers Action Committee, comprising members from a number of different community groups, the Tembisa Civic, the Tembisa Working Committee, and some AZAPO members was set up to help co-ordinate support for the striking workers. Students and youth played a role as well, offering to help clear the township of piling rubbish and sewerage. Community support played a major role in preventing the council from employing scabs. According to the union:

They could not get scabs in Tembisa with its population of over half a million, with widespread unemployment, and the entire workforce in detention. They then abused the system set up by the Department of Manpower, this R5 a day system, so they brought in people from Soweto and Sharpeville". (9)

Nevertheless even these scabs were eventually dissuaded from being taken to Tembisa. The union approached people at pick-up points explaining that there was a strike in progress at Tembisa. The community also played a major role in pressurising scabs from other areas to leave. Soon the council couldn't even find scabs to bus in from other areas. Cooperation between the workers and the community eventually saw a transformation of demands on both sides. Council policemen through discussions held with the community ended up expressing support for the rent boycott. At the same time both sides resolved that the Tembisa Town Council should simply resign. In this way, according to the union, links between the council workers low wages, corruption and high rents were drawn. It was resolved that the workers should play a role in pressurising the council members to resign and to monitor their activities. Three months later the council eventually decided to reinstate all the workers, however original demands have still not been met. At the time about 600 workers were still in detention. In the interim the cost to the council had been very great. No-one was prepared to evict rent boycotters, administrative work ground to a halt, and a number of councillors eventually resigned. This included the mayor, Mr L L Mothibe.

The level of awareness amongst the workers has clearly increased. On February 11 this year council policemen once again came out on



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strike, this time demanding the resignation of one of the new Administrators - Mr More - appointed by the state in the wake of the collapse of the council. Union reports on that day stated that "our members have no confidence in this man. They are dissatisfied with the way he handled wage demands. They told us that the council has no money, but he demanded a R150,000 mayoral car". (10) Newspaper headlines called it a "Municipal Mutiny" and expressed surprise at the role of the council policemen. As a result of these demands Mr More and another official have reportedly been suspended.

Developments in Tembisa have clearly demonstrated the kind of power local authority workers can actually have. Their role as providers of "services" to the community is increasingly being interpreted in a manner which takes account of the needs of the community first, not their bosses. Workers are beginning to understand the impact of such services on the community and are now beginning to appreciate this responsibility. This represents a direct challenge to the myth of "neutral" services provided. SABMAWU says that their union calls this inculcating a sense of responsibility towards the community. As local authority unions they claim that they are in the privileged position of having access to these workers, something not easily done by community groups.

#### Towards one national union

The new local authorities union, due to be launched later this year by COSATU - incorporating the important Cape Town Municipal Workers Association - marks an important turning point in the process of consolidating union organisation in this sector. Other unions to form part of the merger include the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) and South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU). The total estimated membership of these unions however indicates that the large proportion of local authority workers continue to remain unorganised. The new union will include about 40,000 of the 138,000 black workers within this sector. The problem of lack of unity, unions like SABMAWU and NUPS, which remain outside of the new federation will also present further obstacles to union consolidation in this area, particularly in the Transvaal region. A number of difficult challenges face the new union: fragmented bargaining structures; the problem of in-house unions; low wages; racist abuse and bad working conditions. Present attempts to privatise various aspects of service provision must also be looked at. The problem of employer abuse of unemployment, the increasing



resort to "casual" labour as a money saving device possibly presents the most serious immediate problem. JCC labour statistics indicate that already more than 50% of the labour force are designated as "casual". In addition the JCC has virtually stopped recruiting from traditional labour markets in the last four years. Many more urban women workers are being drawn in, on a casual basis, to do the work traditionally done by migrant men. Casualisation and privatisation constitute a serious threat to workers' job security and by implication to the unions. The use of daily casuals, on the R5 a day basis is also increasing. These workers are not entitled to any pensions benefits, they may be easily retrenched, and in the present context are even "cheaper" than migrants. The municipality does not have to subsidise the costs of day to day reproduction and saves on transport provided in recruiting workers from distant rural areas.

In the long term the union will have to unite all local authorities workers and work towards a situation where present legal prohibitions on the right to strike can be challenged. Local authority unions also have a very special and close relationship with community struggles, as was indicated in the Tembisa strike, and hold a very important political role in relation to the staffing of the state apparatus.

#### Footnotes

1. Interview with MGWUSA, February 1987
2. M Golding, "Workers in the state sector", SALB 10.8, 1985, p 43
3. "The struggle for trade union democracy: the case of the JMCEU", SALB 10.8, 1985, p 32
4. M Golding, "Workers in the state sector", p 49
5. "Company unionism - the JMCEU revisited", SALB 11.1, 1985, p 50
6. "The struggle for trade union democracy", p 33
7. "Potchestroom municipality strike", SALB 10.5, 1985, p 18
8. Interview with SABMAWU, January 1987
9. *ibid*
10. The Star Africa News Service 12.2.87

# Black poverty in South Africa

Jeremy Keenan & Mike Sarakinsky

Since the mid-1970's there has been a dramatic escalation in the extent of poverty amongst South Africa's black population, both in the urban as well as the bantustan areas. The government and most employers argue that this is not so, and that the standard of living of blacks has improved substantially over the last ten years or so. Their arguments are usually based on data presented by the government's Central Statistical Services (CSS) and bodies such as UNISA's Bureau of Market Research (BMR).

The CSS's data on black "earnings" is highly misleading in that "earnings", which are usually presented as "income", include not just wages, but allowances, bonuses, overtime, as well as contributions made by both employee and employer to medical aid, provident and pension funds. During the economic upswing of 1978-1981 the state, using this composite of "earnings", was thus able to show that black earnings had risen by 11,3% in real terms. In fact this increase was more than accounted for by increased contributions to pensions funds, which cannot legitimately be regarded as income, and overtime. Indeed, in the manufacturing sector, nearly 20% of black income during this period came from overtime. The truth, which is disguised by these figures, is that wage rates during this "boom" period actually declined in real terms in most sectors of the economy. The CSS figures are also exaggerated by the fact that they exclude the two poorest sectors of the economy, namely agriculture and domestic service, and the lowest paying regions of the country, namely the "independent" bantustans.

The BMR's data (1) which is frequently used by employers is equally suspect, being based on an unacceptable definition of income and a highly questionable definition of "household", whereby "married or unmarried working children and other working relatives living and eating with the family are not considered to be members of the household unless they contribute the larger part of their income to the household". This "exclusion" of family members from their definition of "household" has very serious consequences. One of these is that it leads employers to believe that their black employees' households and the dependency ratio within these households

are smaller than they actually are. For example, the BM shows the average Johannesburg, East Rand and West Rand "multiple" black household to be between 5 and 5,5 persons in size, whereas it is in fact between 7 and 8. Employers can therefore legitimise low wages on the grounds of smaller households and less dependents. Moreover, as the rate of black unemployment has increased over the last few years (and as recorded in the BMR reports) so more children and relatives who were previously employed have lost their jobs and in so doing have become included in the BMR's definition of "household". The result of this is that the BMR's reports show an increase in the size of black households in the urban areas between 1970/75 and 1985 when nearly all other research shows that the average size of urban black households has declined over this period, largely as a result of increasing poverty and hardship forcing families to send their children and old people to live elsewhere, usually in the bantustans.

The BMR's data is also questionable in that its income data includes "income in kind from the employer", lump sum payments received during the past twelve months", as well as "contributions received in cash and in kind", which are not always regarded as legitimate forms of income.

Another argument used by the government and employers to show that the black standard of living has improved is, that since 1970, the distribution of income between blacks and whites has become dramatically less unequal. This argument is false as it only considers the income of "recipients of income" and ignores the "non-recipients" of income - the unemployed, who, as our previous article in the SALB (on current unemployment in SA) has shown, have increased in number rapidly over the past few years. If the distribution of income between race groups is looked at more realistically, that is on a per capita basis, then we see that the per capita income of blacks has tended to remain constant or, more probably, even declined since the mid-1970s.

In Moroka (Soweto), for example, where household sizes have declined by 15% since 1978, real per capita income at the end of 1985 was less than 1% more than it was in 1978 and lower than it was in both 1981 and 1982. Likewise, in Phiri (Soweto), where household sizes have decreased by 8% since 1981, real per capita income has declined by 14% since 1981 and 25% since 1982, while in White City, the poorest part of Soweto, real per capita incomes have declined by 17% since 1982. (2)



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Most comparisons of incomes between blacks and whites are further invalidated by the fact that the CSS's "income" data excludes income from property which goes almost exclusively to whites, and is relatively substantial, making up an estimated 20% or more of total white income.

A further weakness of much data on income, especially as put forward by employers, is that it looks at wages/salaries of individuals. Although it is true that the real wages/salaries of many blacks have increased in real terms over the last few years this does not necessarily mean that they are better off. In fact the opposite is often the case. The reason for this is that these employees do not live as socially isolated human beings. Rather, they are members of families/households in which an increasing number of members have been losing their jobs over the past few years. A wage/salary therefore has to look after more people. When we look at households, the social unit of maintenance and reproduction, as distinct from individual employees, we see that the number of households falling below the poverty line, in both "urban" and "rural" areas has increased significantly in the last few years. For example, in Moroka, one of the better-off suburbs of Soweto, the percentage of households falling below the poverty line, as measured by the Household Effective Level (HEL) has risen as follows:

25%	in 1978
30%	in 1980
34%	in 1981
43%	in 1983
48%	in 1985

In poorer parts of Soweto such as Phiri and White City the percentage of households below the HEL in 1985 had risen to 52% and 62% respectively. (3)

This trend is characteristic of the country as a whole. Data presented at the 1984 Carnegie Conference on Poverty showed the following proportion of black households in Cape Town and Durban as being below the Minimum Living Level (MLL): (4)

PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BELOW THE MLL

Areas		Proportion
CAPE TOWN		
Crossroads	s	28,9
Guguletu	t	8,7
Modderdam	s	32,1
Uitsig	t	28,4
Bonteheuvel	t	9,1
Clermont	s	42,9
DURBAN		
Folweni	s	48,7
Inanda	s	41,5
Malakazi	s	53,6
Chesterville	t	62,5
Lamontville	t	66,7
KwaMashu	t	41,3
Umlazi	t	52,9

s= squatter settlement

Percentage below the MLL for Durban squatter settlements combined is 45,8%.

t= township

Percentage below the MLL for Durban township areas combined is 50%.

Studies of selected communities in the Durban metropolitan areas, also presented at the 1984 Carnegie Conference show the following percentage of households below the Household Subsistence Level (HSL).

Proportion of households below and above HSL and HEL in Hambanati (sample size = 180 households).

Above HSL	58	(32,2)
Below HSL	122	(67,8)
Above HEL	19	(10,6)
Below HEL	161	(89,4)

absolute number = number of households; bracketed number = % age  
(note: The MLL is more or less equivalent to the Household Subsistence Level)

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tence Level (HSL). The HEL, as referred to in the above mentioned Soweto data, is 150% of the HSL. In other words, if we apply the HEL to the Durban and Cape Town figures the percentages below the poverty datum line will substantially increase).

In the urban areas the main causes of this increasing poverty have been the increasing rate of unemployment, the high rate of inflation and a consequent decline in real wages, and the loss of informal sector income - the latter being a direct product of the "unrest" situation in the townships. An analysis of poverty amongst Soweto households in 1985 showed that the main reasons for households having become worse off were: increased unemployment (62%), inflation (decline in real wages) (17%), and loss in informal sector income (11%). (5)

In the bantustan areas the situation is generally much worse with around 75% of households being below the HEL and at least 50% being below the MLL. Households below the MLL are living in severe poverty and tend to be readily characterised by their members suffering from symptoms of malnutrition and other poverty related disease

Statistics produced by Charles Simkins at the 1984 Carnegie Conference showed that the number of people in the bantustans with no income whatsoever had risen from 0,25 million in 1960 to 1,43 million in 1980. (6) The figure has certainly risen substantially since 1980.

The main causes of the increase in poverty in the bantustans are:

- \* increased unemployment. This has been discussed in the preceding article. It should merely be mentioned that a major contribution to "homeland" unemployment has been the government's urban labour preference policy, the explicit aim of which has been to export the worst ravages of unemployment from the urban areas to the bantustans.
- \* Unemployment in the "independent" bantustans of Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Ciskei and Venda is going to become rapidly worse as "citizens" of these bantustans are going to be effectively denied employment in the rest of South Africa as a result of the government's new Restoration of Citizenship and Aliens Acts.
- \* decline in remittances due to the decrease in the number



of migrant workers, and declining wages.

- \* the intensified relocation of the absolute surplus population into the bantustan areas.
- \* loss of subsistence land. Over the first decade or so much of the productive subsistence land in the bantustans has been taken over by both state and private capital for large scale commercial agricultural enterprises with the result that tens of thousands of bantustan residents have been effectively dispossessed of access to this resource. (7)
- \* the takeover of much of the bantustan (tribal) land for game parks during this period has further exacerbated this problem. For example, the establishment of the Pilanesberg Game Park in Bophuthatswana, which covers between 50-60,000 hectares, saw the forcible, illegal and uncompensated seizure of 9,500 hectares of land owned privately by the Bakgatla tribe. Apart from the extensive loss of such things as firewood, building materials, wild fruits, pottery clay, water supply, grazing areas, etc., the tribe lost a large proportion of cattle. In addition increased land pressure on its remaining land in conjunction with drought left nearly all the households without any agricultural subsistence production. Before the opening of the Park in 1980, 37% of the population were cattle owners, compared with 13% in 1984. By 1984, the mean average annual agricultural production was less than 1 bag of mealies per household, in an area which had hitherto been comparatively well-off in terms of subsistence resources. (8)
- \* Another example of this has been at Thaba 'Nchu where two whole villages, numbering some 90 households were bulldozed without compensation, to make way for another game park adjoining Sol Kerzner's newest casino/entertainment project - the Thaba 'Nchu Sun. (A proposed park of some 70,000 hectares is on the drawing boards for Kangwane, while several plans for park development are being discussed for Kwazulu).
- \* pensions. As a result of a combination of corruption, theft, bureaucratic incompetence and the current insolvency of certain homelands, eg Bophuthatswana, social security payments, notably pensions, to which the people are

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legally entitled, are rarely paid.

- \* homeland "taxation". Most of the homeland authorities, both central and local are levying numerous illegal "taxes" on the local population. This system of corruption is tied to the functions and mechanisms of control performed by the bantustans. It is also one of the main mechanisms for the personal enrichment of individuals associated with the ruling elements, as well as a way of supplementing the national budgets, much of which are being embezzled and siphoned off by homeland political leaders and their associates. The net effect of this is that the poorer elements of the homeland populations are being bled of much of their meagre monetary incomes. (9)

#### POVERTY AND HEALTH

This overall increase in the level of both relative and absolute poverty amongst the country's black population is reflected in peoples' health. Recent medical research (and reports on various poverty related diseases) shows that poverty related diseases are increasing, particularly amongst blacks. (10)

##### 1. Tuberculosis (T.B.)

Medical evidence provided at the Carnegie Conference shows that:

- \* 6% of black deaths were from T.B.;
- \* of all T.B. cases, 80% were black, 15% coloured, 1,5% Asian, and 1% white;

A paper presented by Dr D. Webster in 1982 showed that: (11)

- in 1920 there were 0,5 incidents of T.B. per 1,000 population
- in 1950 there were 2 incidents of T.B. per 1,000 population
- in 1970 there were 4 incidents of T.B. per 1,000 population
- in 1978 150 deaths per 100,000 population were caused by T.B.
- in 1982 there were 20 notifications per 100,000 whites
- in 1982 there were 300+ notifications per 100,000 coloureds and blacks

(NOTE: the notifications amongst blacks are "the tip of the iceberg" as many do not notify.)

- The greatest incidence of T.B., is now being found in the

numerous black resettlement schemes and squatter settlements around the country. The incidence of T.B. in these areas is considerably higher than in the townships.

Information provided in September 1986 by the Department of National Health and Development shows that within the Republic of South Africa (excluding all homelands) the notification of T.B. is now around 230 per 100,000 population. This figure covers all the race groups, and therefore cannot directly be compared with the 1982 figures given above. Notification of T.B. in the homeland areas is given at around 80 per 100,000 in the non-independent bantustans, and at around 160-170 per 100,000 in the TBVC states. These figures are totally unreliable. The Department of National Health and Development itself admits that T.B. is much higher in the homeland areas, and the lower rate of notification is not an indication of a decline of T.B. in these areas but rather of the collapse of health services in these areas.

Indeed, the collapse of health services in most bantustan regions over the last year or two (12) is such that data on health in these area is more or less non-existent.

## 2. Cholera

According to medical evidence submitted to the Carnegie Conference in 1984, cholera is now endemic in South Africa.

- \* In 1983 a cholera epidemic originated in the Eastern Transvaal, spreading to the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and the east coast;
- \* approximately 100,000 cholera patients were treated between 1980 and 1984;
- \* given the fact that most blacks with cholera are not treated, the evidence presented to the Carnegie Conference estimates that there were 2-3 million cases of cholera during that period. Most of these were in the bantustan areas of Transkei, Ciskei and KwaZulu. In spite of attempts at public denial there were serious outbreaks of cholera in Bophuthatswana, for example, hospital staff at Jubilee Hospital (near Hammanskraal/Temba, Bophuthatswana) confirmed that at least three people from the "squatter" area of Bosplaas died, while



- poverty -

more than 200 were hospitalised.

### 3. Measles

Evidence submitted to the above-mentioned Carnegie Conference showed that for every 1,000 children who get measles: 2 whites die; 5 Indians die; 18 blacks die; and 28 coloureds die.

### 4. Hypertension

Medical evidence presented at the Carnegie Conference shows the incidence of hypertension in the following areas:

- \* Johannesburg - Amongst registered black work seekers 30% of people over 30 years, and 40% between 50-59 years showed symptoms of hypertension;
- \* Durban - Random surveys in Durban showed the following incidence of hypertension per racial group: Zulu 25%; Indian 14,2%; White 17,2%.
- \* Cape Town - A survey amongst coloured and black dockworkers showed that 43,9% of each of the racial groups suffered from hypertension.

Hypertension is a directly poverty-related disease caused by stress which in turn may be caused by such things as unemployment, overcrowding, low wages, etc.

It has been assumed that hypertension is a predominantly urban disease. Recent research undertaken by medically-trained post graduate students shows that hypertension in "rural"/bantustan areas is extremely widespread and appears to be increasing. (13)

### 5. Malnutrition

Evidence presented at the Carnegie Conference based on a survey in Soweto of children under 17 years of age showed that malnutrition is prevalent. (14)

## MALNUTRITION AMONGST CHILDREN UNDER 17 IN SOWETO

	2 years	2-5 years	6-9 years	10-12 years	13-16 years
No of subjects	74	134	126	108	81
Malnutri- tion	18,9	29,1	38,9	45,4	38,3
Stunting	63,5	66,4	5,5	59,2	45,7
Wasting	9,6	20,1	25,4	24,1	16,0

Malnutrition is primarily caused by inadequate diet - a direct result of poverty.

The general increase in malnutrition and diseases such as T.B., cholera, measles and hypertension amongst blacks is a direct result of poverty. One of the main causes of this poverty is unemployment, and the government's policies which have been a major contributory factor towards black unemployment. But, as the previous article on unemployment (SALB 12.1) has already shown, one of the major reasons for people losing their jobs is illness and ill-health.

#### Footnotes

1. BMR, Income and expenditure patterns of urban black multiple households in specified urban areas, 1985, Bureau of Market Research, Unisa. Research Report series 130, Pretoria 1986
2. J Keenan, "A socio-economic profile of Soweto households during the "reform" era 1978-1986", in proceedings of the 1986 Manufacturing Management Convention, PE Corporate Services, Johannesburg, 1986
3. *ibid*
4. Cape Town and Durban figures: J B Prinsloo, "A description of income, expenditure and earnings patterns from households in Cape Town and Durban"; Hambanati figures: V Supersad, "Socio-economic status of selected communities in the Durban metropolitan area". Both papers presented at the 1984 Carnegie Conference, UCT

- poverty -

5. J Keenan, "A socio-economic profile"
6. C Simkins, "What has been happening to income distribution and poverty in the homelands?", Carnegie Conference, UCT, 1984
7. See J Keenan, "Agribusiness in the bantustans", in SA Review III, Johannesburg, 1985
8. J Keenan, "The Pilanesberg Game Reserve", Wits University, 1984
9. A detailed account of how this system works is given in J Keenan, "Pandora's box: the private accounts of a bantustan community authority", in SA Review IV, Johannesburg, forthcoming
10. P Disler and C Oliver (eds), "Some diseases associated with poverty", Carnegie Conference, 1984. Most of the data presented here is drawn from this paper
11. D Webster, "Capital, class and consumption: a social history of T.B. in South Africa", in Consumption in the land of plenty: T.B. in South Africa, conference papers of the Medical Students Conference, UCT, 1982
12. See for example, A Zwi, "Piecing together health in the homelands", Carnegie Conference, 1984
13. D Davis, unpublished honours dissertation, Wits University, 1984
14. Shuenyane et al, reproduced in N Pillay, "Poverty in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area: a survey of research", Carnegie Conference, 1984, p 19

## Building tomorrow today

Review: S Friedman, Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions 1970-1984, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987; price R21,00 (R13,00 for workers)

This is certainly the most readable account of South Africa's emergent trade union movement to appear thus far - and represents pretty good value at R21 for 500 pages (R13 to workers). It is also a valuable record of the struggles and debates of the labour movement during the 1970s and early 1980s.

The account relies in part upon subsequent documentation and retrospective interviews - but most of it rests upon the eye-



witness testimony of the author himself who was a labour reporter for most of the period. (Articles from the Financial Mail and the Rand Daily Mail are the most often quoted sources.) It is therefore very much one man's account of South African labour history - and while Friedman's gripping, and often amusing, narrative of early conflicts with recalcitrant managements will appeal to all (in the progressive camp), his treatment of rival trade union strategies and other political traditions will not endear him to the mainstream of nationalist opposition. It is then a controversial work.

The book begins with a history of previous waves of trade union organisation, in which the author argues that whilst each was ultimately defeated by state repression, the unionists involved also made real tactical choices which also contributed to their downfall. There follows a critique of the ICU, Max Gordon's unions, CNETU and SACTU in terms of their failure to meet the standards set by the emerging unions of the 1970s. This anachronistic approach makes for bad history, especially when quite severe judgements are not backed up by any further historical research. But the author's primary concern is rather to exemplify present strategies in the light of the short-comings of the past. Thus Gordon's skills in manipulating legal channels - particularly the Wage Board - are praised by the author, whilst his failure to train and build up a strong factory floor leadership is roundly condemned. The organisational short-comings of the ICU and CNETU are to be found in their failure to establish national industrial unions. CNETU particularly, in the author's view, failed to use the relatively favourable conditions of the war years to consolidate organisationally - the parallel is SAAWU in the early 1980s. SACTU's crime was to have devoted too much time to "politics" to the detriment of factory organisation. (In fact recent research by Rob Lambert suggests that in some factories at least the close links with the Congress alliance actually promoted trade union recruitment.)

The heroic mass strikes of the early 1970's marked a decisive turning point for working class protest in South Africa. Equally important were the early attempts to establish some kind of organisation - the wages commissions, the advice offices and the benefit funds - as well as the early unions themselves. These first frail attempts at organisation often necessitated alliances with the most unlikely partners: in Natal with Buthelezi and Inkatha, with the Labour Party, and with sympathetic elements within

the otherwise hostile Trade Union Council of South Africa. (The book includes a devastating critique of TUCSA's role in trying to curb black worker organisation and militancy.)

The book is probably at its best when describing the mechanics of trade union organisation, the strategies adopted and the day to day tactics of the unionists concerned. Referring to the harsh years after 1973, Friedman writes: "The unions won few new factories which would remain organised or improvements for their members, but they did gain two weapons which were to prove even more valuable: tight factory organisation - and the tool to implement it - the formal recognition agreement." (p86) Certainly factory organisation was to distinguish the new unionism from anything that had gone before, but it was to take some years before managements were generally willing to sign recognition agreements (Smith and Nephew being the honourable exception) - how did they manage to survive in the meantime?

Friedman's analysis of the Wiehahn initiative and the struggles and debates that surrounded it is particularly powerful. The attempt by the state to control and coopt the new unions was explicit. However, according to unionist Alec Erwin, "They couldn't control us because they didn't understand us. They believed we were the same as the established unions." (p162) The emerging unions indeed went on to undermine many of the carefully laid plans for control - for example refusing to accept the exclusion of migrant workers from the new dispensation and agreeing to register only on a non-racial basis. Most importantly, the state's reforming stance did provide the opportunity for the unions to move massively into the factories.

By the early 1980s, with the onset of economic depression, the problem became one of how to consolidate the rapid gains already made. It was now, argues the author, that the strategies and tactics developed in the harsh conditions of the 1970s came into their own: shopsteward organisation in the factories, a system of mandating and accountability, concentrating on realisable demands, national industrial unions. Those unions that followed these guidelines survived and grew; unions like SAAWU - with a high political profile, relying on mass community mobilisation rather than factory floor organisation - splintered and declined. Friedman shows how the changing balance between the different trade union strategies was to crucially influence the unity talks which culminated with the launch of COSATU.



The thesis of this book is that in the repressive conditions of the 1970s a new trade union strategy was born which offered real material gains to ordinary people and at the same time promised them some control over their own lives. The elements of this strategy were to utilise legal rights and structures, however slender, in order to create further space for building up factory floor organisation and workers confidence and power - and it is this point that was crucial: without that worker power any purely legal strategy was at the mercy of changing state and management policy. It followed that, initially at least, unions should avoid high-profile political involvement in order to build up their factory base. Also, they were required to respond tactically to initiatives by government and employers - to compromise and negotiate in order to survive and in order to utilise any potential space for further gains. Recognition and membership of industrial councils were not then to be seen as issues of principle (although of course significant sections of the emerging trade union movement saw them in exactly this light.) The first result of this strategy was that at the end of the 1970s - and despite management hostility and state repression - the union movement was still there. The foundations were laid for the growth of the 1980s based on the model of national industrial unions united in a tight federation. Now it was possible for the union movement to take up the political challenge, but only if it did so under the banner of independent worker control of any action taken. If this sounds familiar it is because Friedman's book is essentially an elaboration of classic FOSATU strategy. However, by the mid 1980s many elements of the old FOSATU were beginning to look afresh particularly at their political policy.

Assessing the political differences within the labour movement, Friedman argues, that by 1982: "all unions were now political - but some were effective while others were not." (p277) The difference was "between those who were strong in the factories and those who weren't." (p283) It was the older unions, he believes, that were to develop a new independent worker politics. This new politics is never really fully defined but seems to consist of the old tactics of "compromise and negotiation", accountable to the membership through the process of mandating, with these techniques being gradually extended beyond the workplace. The author believes that this style of politics is now under threat as a result of internal divisions within COSATU: "the battle has come to centre largely around an attempt by some of the older unions and their



members to inject the same internal democracy into the new federation as they had come to expect from the organisations which had preceeded it." (p413) This judgement is premature and certainly too simplistic. It also reflects the author's very particular political vision in which the only possibility of (relatively peaceful) democratic change will be by negotiation and compromise along the model of industrial relations bargaining, albeit backed up by mass factory floor-type organisation. But as Friedman himself acknowledges this process is slow (he quotes one trade unionist as saying that it may take two decades to prepare workers for the decisive political battles - p502) and it depends on the good will of the state. The author does not manage to show conclusively that the strategies developed in the 1970's to build trade union organisation are equal to the tasks of the second half of the 1980's: to build a movement for fundamental political change. What he does demonstrate though is the crucial debt that South African opposition political culture owes to the trade union movement both for its organisational expertise and for its contribution to democratic and socialist thought and practice.

One technical feature of the book's production requires further comment. At the end of each chapter are lengthy notes which take up some of the points made in the previous chapter in greater depth. These are for the benefit of the specialist, explains the author, leaving the text less cluttered and more accessible to the general reader. Fair enough and it works if you read cover-to-cover. The drawback is there is no easy way of accessing all this detail - whether in the text or in the notes - as there is no index. This is surely an oversight if this book is also meant to act as a work of reference. Moreover the references at the end of each chapter are skimpy and not tied in to the text - again an attempt to cut corners which detracts from the book's authority.

But limitations and criticisms notwithstanding this book is essential reading for anybody who supports the South African labour movement (and I suspect for managements as well). Many of the lessons of the 1970's still hold good, a point which needs to be reiterated at a time when it has become fashionable in some quarters to undervalue the heritage of FOSATU. Friedman though is perhaps too attached to the past. But if the book stimulates some debate over present and future strategies it will have served a useful purpose.

(Jon Lewis, March 1987)

# Economic notes for trade unions

The annual rate of inflation remains in the 17% to 20% range. The latest figures are for March 1987, when, on average, prices were 6,8% higher than a year before.

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	Consumer Price Index (1980=100) March 1987	Annual rate of inflation (% increase over 1 year) March 1987
Cape Town	255,6	18,3%
Port Elizabeth	249,6	17,0%
East London	234,6	16,1%
Durban	251,4	15,9%
Pietermaritzburg	254,7	15,5%
Witwatersrand	254,7	16,1%
Vaal Triangle	259,6	15,6%
Pretoria	269,3	19,3%
Klerskdorp	254,5	22,2%
Bloemfontein	235,4	13,6%
OFS Goldfields	264,0	16,9%
Kimberley	241,5	15,2%
<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	<b>255,0</b>	<b>16,8%</b>

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Source : Central Statistical Services

Economists expect that the average inflation rate in 1987 will be between 15% and 19%.

## Living wages

COSATU has now launched their major living wage campaign. But how such is a "living wage"? Cosatu have not said how much a living wage is for all workers. Because conditions differ in each region and industry, the living wage has been left to individual factories and unions to decide.

Given that unions reject the Supplemented Living Level, the Household Subsistence Level and other poverty datum lines used by employers in setting poverty wages, it may assist unions to examine other ways of determining a minimum living wage.

- economic notes -

The Labour Research Service have made an estimate based on housing costs. Housing is the biggest single item in a worker's budget, but housing should never use up more than 25% of a worker's wage. So if we can work out the cost of decent housing, we can estimate a living wage.

The Labour Research Service have found that a modest family home, with all the necessary amenities, privacy, sanitation, internal doors and walls, etc., will cost about R25,000. The bond repayments will be R212,50 per month if the first-time buyer's subsidy is taken into account.

Now R212,50 multiplied by 4 is equal to R850. R850 per month is the LRS estimate of a living wage.

R850 per month is equal to:  
R200 per week  
R4,36 per hour (45 hour week)  
R4,91 per hour (40 hour week)

After paying for housing (R212,50) and PAYE tax (about R30,83), a worker earning a living wage of R850 would have more than R600 per month left over for food, clothing, transport and other expenses.

The Living wage is not a subsistence wage like the Supplemented Living Level. It should provide for certain comforts and amenities of life, not mere survival. The LRS living wage estimate will give a worker almost R100 per month more than the latest SLL after housing costs have been paid. In addition to this extra R100, the worker on a Living wage will be getting a decent family home, not the matchbox which is provided for in the SLL and other poverty datum lines.

"...not a miserable allowance to starve on,  
but living wages."

Lloyd Jones, in The Beehive, 1874.

(Compiled by the 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.

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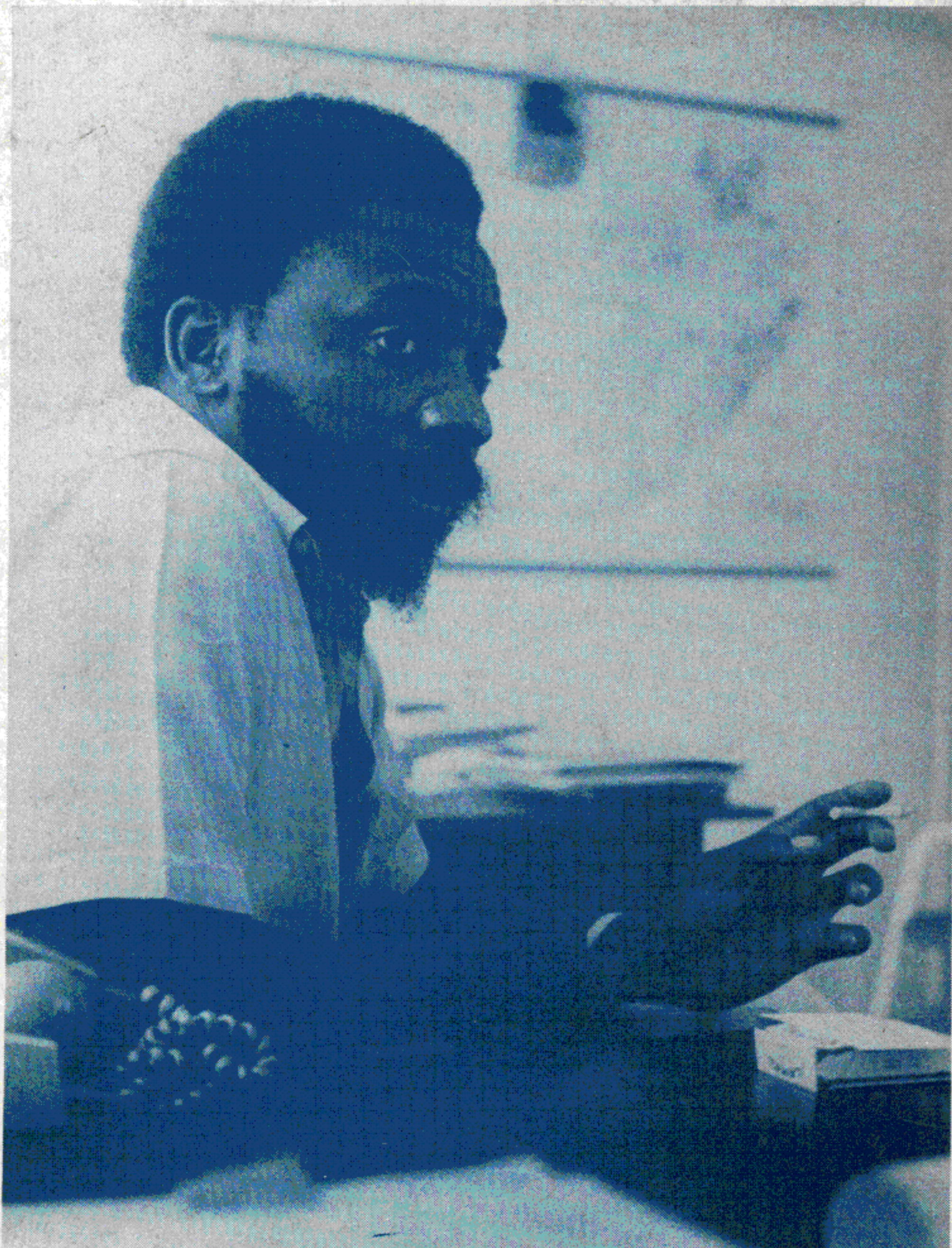
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