

SOUTH AFRICAN

# LABOUR BULLETIN

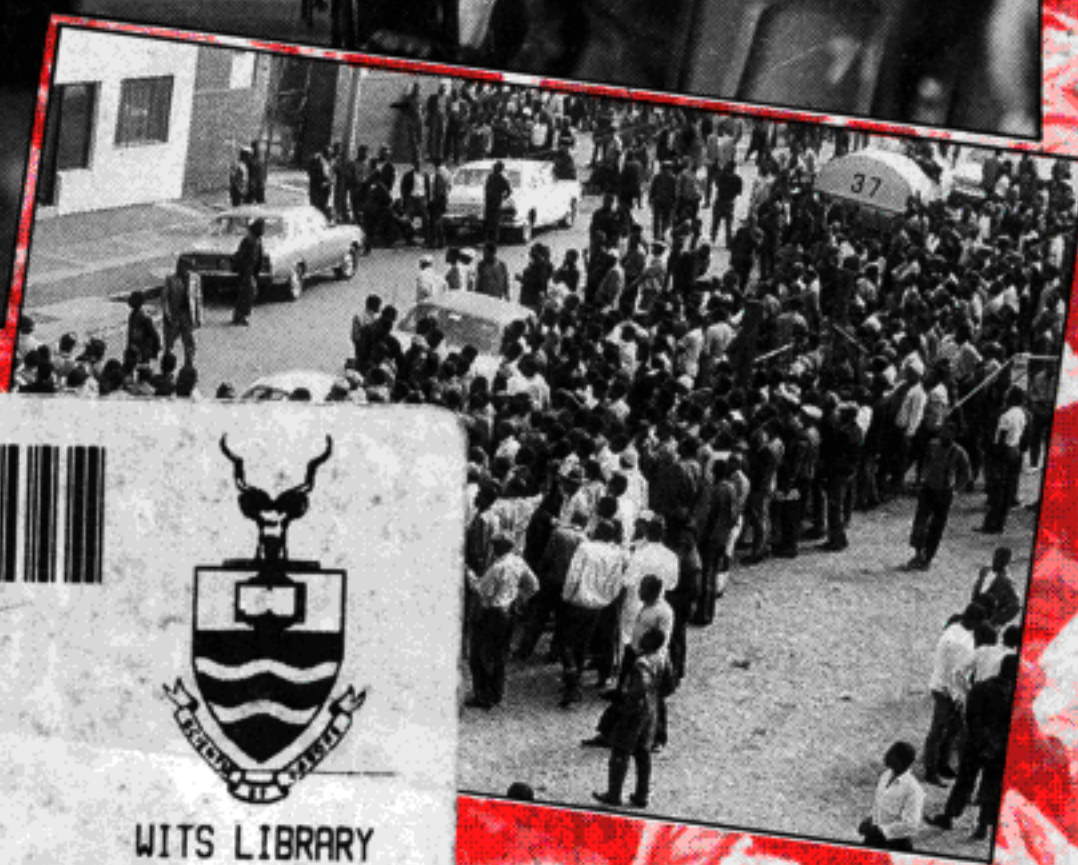
May/June 1993 Volume 17 Number 3

Debate: the ICFTU and SA  
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Medical Arts  
Building  
220 Jeppe St  
(cnr Troye St)  
Johannesburg  
2001 South Africa

P O Box 3851  
Johannesburg  
2000 South Africa

Telephone No:  
(011) 337 8511

Fax No:  
(011) 337 9207

**Managing Editor**  
Karl von Holdt

**General Manager**  
Pete Richer

**Layout and  
Production**  
Morice Smithers  
Stan Thusini

**Co-ordination**  
Di Stuart

**Sub-editing**  
Annette Griessel  
Liesa Jossel  
Muff Andersson

**Reception**  
Sibongile Zwane

**Circulation**  
Collin Govender

**Photographer**  
William Matlala

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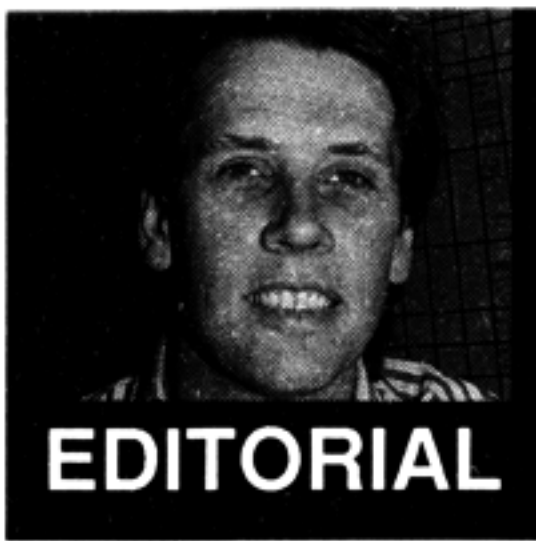
**Cover photos**

*(from top)* The mayor of Durban addressing striking municipal workers in 1973; Frame workers meet in James Bolton Hall in Durban to discuss the strike; workers gather outside the Frame factory in Durban.

**Background picture:** *Protesting workers demonstrating in Durban*

**Picture on pages 18 – 19:** *Municipal workers demonstrating in Durban in 1973*

*(Pictures courtesy of: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection, Old Court House, Aliwal Street, Durban 4001 Tel: 031 – 3006241)*



# SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

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**1973** the beginning of the new union movement,  
the beginning of the end for apartheid

---

**O**ne morning in January 1973, the workers at Coronation Brick and Tile walked off the job and started the wave of Durban strikes. That moment broke the 'decade of silence' after the banning of the ANC and PAC and the crushing of SACTU, and gave birth to the modern labour movement in South Africa. The new force that was born would prove to be one of the most powerful of the many battering rams that would bring apartheid down.

In this issue of LABOUR BULLETIN, we celebrate the courage and defiance of those ordinary workers, such as the Mr Nzimande mentioned by Samuel Mthethwa, who stood up 20 years ago and demanded something different. We celebrate also the long, hard and painful struggles to build the organised labour movement and win workers' rights in the face of the bitter resistance of the employers and the apartheid state. Many have died, many have sacrificed, many have lost their jobs in the struggle. Let us celebrate them.

We also visit some Natal factories – including major participants in the 1973 strikes, Frame and Alusaf – to hear what workers and managers have to say about current challenges in the workplace. It is not surprising that one of the major themes to emerge is that of 'participation'.

For workers the struggle against apartheid despotism has generated a vision of substantial democracy at work. They claim, as their right, participation in, or negotiation over, all decision-making that affects their workplace. For managers, on the other hand, participation is a means to overcome the conflict and antagonism that the apartheid era produced on the shopfloor, by winning co-operation from workers.

But while heady debates and experiments

about participation are crucial to the future of the labour movement, we should not delude ourselves that basic union and worker rights remain uncontested. The protracted and successful strike of SACCAWU against Shoprite/Checkers illustrates this point.

Indeed, after getting off to a relatively quiet start this year industrial action is hotting up. Workers in many sectors are militant and prepared to fight very tough struggles. The focus now will be moving to the public sector as disputes come to a head in education, health, municipal, post, telecommunications and the railways.

Industrial conflict has brought to the fore another disturbing trend: the re-emergence of police brutality against striking and demonstrating workers. Both Checkers and municipal workers have been victims. This is outrageous at a time when the country is supposed to be moving towards democracy. Workers have a democratic and civic right to strike or protest, and we should demand that the police and their government recognise this.

## Errata

We apologise for the large number of typographical and other errors in our last issue. In *Women in the unions*, Mathapelo Makgoba's name was spelt incorrectly. In *On the shopfloor*, PPWAWU's Richard Hlope was incorrectly named Alfred Hlope, and his company is Afmat Bedding, not Afcol Bedding. In the last paragraph of Jane Barrett's review of POLITICS AND THE ACCORD, "it is impossible" should have read "it is possible".

KARL VON HOLDT

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## The SACP: in search of truth?

In a recent article in NEW NATION, SACP ideologue Jeremy Cronin waxed lyrical about the "enormous achievements" and "rich store of lessons to be garnered" from China's economic miracle. The difference between China and the Soviet Union, argues Cronin, is that China's economic strategy has rested, not on export-led growth and wholesale privatisation, but on consumer-led growth and a combination of state plan and an expanding non-state sector.

Is this really true? A recent article in the GUARDIAN WEEKLY reports that cadres at every level have simply appropriated public assets and in many cases sold them to foreigners; that the party is seen by the people as a corrupt elite that wheels and deals in millions every day; that inflation is running at 25 – 30%, eroding wages and savings; that the social support system of production units is collapsing; that rural incomes are falling because of the high price of manufactured goods. These are all problems that Cronin says exist in Russia, not China!

The economic growth in China is being driven by massive investments by the capitalists of Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea – not noted for their



respect for worker and union rights!

To reinforce the point, the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation is campaigning for textile and clothing manufactures to pull out of China because of China's "notorious employment practices and conditions, almost non-existent health and safety provisions and its suppression of independent trade unions."

Then there is the small matter of the suppression of democracy and the absence of human rights in 'Red' China. Human rights activists claim more than a million Chinese are detained every year without ever appearing in court!

No, Jeremy, we require more from a leader in the 'workers party'. We have to ask whether the new warmth of the SACP towards China is generated by a rigorous quest for the truth – or by the fact that the Chinese Communist Party is a very wealthy organisation? ♦

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## Rising star

This really is a land of opportunity and rising stars. Twenty three years ago one

Mohale Mahaniele appeared as a state witness in a Terrorism Act trial against Winnie Mandela and 21 others. The same man served on PW Botha's state economic council. Last year he was chosen "businessman of the year" by NEW NATION and Engen. He was a pall-bearer at OR Tambo's funeral. He is MD of SA's biggest black owned business – National Sorghum Breweries ...

How about a toast to the New South Africa! ♦

---

## Whither SABC?

SABC recently conducted a survey of staff on the Good Morning SA programme. The result? Seventy eight percent were dissatisfied with the salary structure, 82% complained about no career planning, 90% said work was unfairly divided, and 91% thought production quality could be improved.

SABC personnel manager Dick Logchies commented that the survey results point to general concerns that could be found in any workplace." Sounds like Logchies should be fired.

Of course he's probably right about workplaces in SA. Maybe all companies should get a new board – appointed by judges rather than shareholders.

While on the SABC, new chair van zyl Slabbert really takes the cake for dodging the real issues. He was quoted as



being "embarrassed" by his choice. Was he embarrassed because De Klerk had rejected the eminent linguist Dr Njabulo Ndebele as a chairperson on the grounds that he could not speak Afrikaans, with the obvious implication that only a white Afrikaner was acceptable? Not a bit! The real reason for Slabbert's embarrassment was that he does not have time for the job! ♦

### Managers cannot stand on heads while meeting clients

The industrial council has recently been grappling with the weighty subject of when is an employee so eccentric that he or she can be dismissed for this reason. The case concerned a sales manager employed by Olivetti.

One of his acts of eccentricity was carrying pens in his shirt pocket. Not a terrible thing, you may say. Until you hear that he had 36 pens in his pocket. His other eccentricities included wearing a cricket hat to work, carrying a camera around his neck at work and using the company's copiers and faxes to support the "Yes" vote during last year's referendum. How did Olivetti respond? Not with a hearing, but by giving him a lecture "on the way the Italians do business".

The court took this case seriously and gave examples of when eccentricity is so

severe it will amount to a dismissable offence. Wearing odd socks is acceptable eccentricity, but meeting with clients while standing on your head is not. Likewise a manager could be dismissed for coming to work wearing a bathing costume (except of course if he or she is a

lifeguard).

So. Should the rights of eccentrics be protected in the new constitution? And what about affirmative action for eccentrics – to make amends for the long history of discrimination against them? ♦

### Anglo hits back

Dear Editor

There are two sides to every story. You've had one (Anglo's hired gun' in RED EYE, Jan/Feb 1993). Let us tell you ours.

1. The ANC proposed a conference on Anti-Trust and included my name, Anglo and De Beers. But we were not notified – I discovered by accident when another prominent person in the local debate sent me a copy of the programme (several weeks old by then).

2. The original programme made little concession to the *debate*. The Chicago school, now the orthodox view in the US, was excluded, as was any view from local academics critical of the ANC's developing orthodoxy. Finally company spokesmen were invited only to be respondents to a couple of papers – I suppose it was assumed that they couldn't possibly have anything of substance to say.

In essence then, the playing field about which the Alliance so often complains was decisively tilted in advance.

3. It was at this stage that I contacted the ANC and gently said whilst we felt it was an important subject and would like to participate, we could not do so with the deck so decisively stacked against us.

4. In the end, the ANC saw the logic of a more open debate, and the Embassy of the US confirmed that had they earlier notice from the organisers, they would have been delighted to foot the bill for the eminent US professor we had invited.

I don't suppose any of this will get the time of day in RED EYE ...

Regards

**M W Spicer**

Group Public Affairs Consultant, Anglo American

*Why, Mr Spicer! Whatever made you think I wouldn't publish your letter?? – RED EYE*



**Collective Bargaining**

## Bitter strike at Shoprite/Checkers



*SACCAWU takes on one of the giants ... and wins!*

*Photo: William Matlala*

**T**hirty four days of industrial action by 10 000 members of SA Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) at Shoprite/Checkers, ended with victory for the workers.

The main reason for the strike was that Pepkor, the company which took over Checkers in 1991, unilaterally terminated the nine-year-old recognition agreement with SACCAWU at the beginning of this year. Trouble has, however, been brewing for some time. Since the Pepkor takeover, there has been a

rising level of conflict in the company. In October last year, for example, there was a three-day national stoppage over the dismissal of shopstewards at the Heidelberg store. Pepkor, which also owns Pep stores, Ackermans, Smart Centre and Frasers mine stores, has a long history of adversarial industrial relations.

Management wanted to negotiate a new recognition agreement, but refused to reinstate the old agreement while the negotiation was taking place. Throughout the dispute, SACCAWU stated

clearly that it was willing to negotiate a new agreement, but believed that the old agreement needed to be in place until such time as a new document was signed. The union feels strongly that workers' rights must be protected during the time that negotiation takes place.

### **"Back to the politics of 1948"**

Given management's behaviour since they cancelled the recognition agreement, it seems that SACCAWU insistence on

protecting workers in the interim, was fully justified. In January, when the agreement was cancelled, new rules were introduced in the stores. The union claims that management refused to discuss these, and grievance meetings about this were turned into disciplinary hearings. Many shopstewards were fired and time off for union meetings was refused.

Shoprite/Checkers management was quick to call in the police during the course of the strike. The police, in turn, were often brutal in dealing with strikers. For example, police used teargas, sjamboks, batons and dogs to evict workers who were sitting-in at various company stores on 17 May. The Barberton police were particularly heavy-handed. Eighteen workers, who had been part of a sit-in at the Barberton store, were hospitalised following police action, and the shopsteward who had been co-ordinating the strike in the area suffered severe head injuries. Managers, according to SACCAWU, "looked on, laughing". In various events around the country, over 300 workers were arrested while sitting-in, and another 120 workers were arrested for picketing.

"Shoprite/Checkers management is trying to return to the politics of 1652 and 1948," said Patricia Khumalo of the strike co-ordinating committee.

After cancelling the old recognition agreement,



*The strike committee: 'We will defend our rights to the last drop of blood.'*

*Photo: William Matlala*

Shoprite/Checkers management unilaterally imposed their own draft for a new agreement. One of the major problems with it was the company's insistence on a system of minority unionism, whereby any trade union which represents at least 10% of the workforce would have full representation in a joint bargaining forum. In addition to this, Shoprite/Checkers proposals showed that the

company wished to cut back on the amount of time which shopstewards could use to represent workers, or attend to union business. They cut shopstewards' training leave from four days to two days, and placed strict limits on time that stewards are given to meet or negotiate with management. "This move would not only erode the union's ability to represent our members," according to SACCAWU's Jeremy Daphne, "it would also get in the way of smooth and progressive industrial relations."

### **Worker and community response**

Early on in the strike, SACCAWU called on all communities to boycott Shoprite/Checkers stores for the duration of the strike. The boycott was deeply effective in a number of areas, and the company was forced to temporarily close at least three stores. The boycott was strongest in the Eastern



*Trolleys stand idle as the strike takes effect*

*Photo: William Matlala*



*Debating the strike: a shopper argues with workers on the picket line*

*Photo: William Matlala*

Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, and in some of the large urban stores, such as Hillbrow.

Worker support for the strike was also strong, despite some predictions to the contrary. An article in the *BUSINESS DAY*, for example, expressed doubt over "whether the union will be able to sustain a strike over an issue of little material importance to workers. A recognition dispute, although important to the union bureaucracy, nowadays does not have the same resonance as a wage dispute on the shopfloor" (Jankowitz and Fine, *BUSINESS DAY* 17 May 1993). But it seems that these writers, and Shoprite/Checkers management itself, underestimated workers' determination to stand behind their union. "The recognition agreement is our life and death," Patricia Khumalo of the strike committee told

LABOUR BULLETIN. "We will defend our rights until the last drop of blood."

### **Management offensive**

During the strike, the Shoprite/Checkers management defended itself vigorously against allegations of unfairness. Management said they gave SACCAWU three months written notice of their intention to suspend the old recognition agreement, but that SACCAWU "failed to pursue negotiations to conclude a new agreement before the expiry of the old one." The company also alleged that strike ballots "displayed massive irregularities, rendering the strike unlawful." During the course of the five-week strike, however, the company did not take action to prevent the strike on legal grounds.

Shoprite/Checkers also defended its right to call in the police to deal with certain forms of industrial action.

They claim they were not given notice that the union intended to hold sleep-ins in the stores, and that "because of considerations of hygiene and security in the food store environment ... police had to forcibly eject strikers from the stores."

A month into the strike, Shoprite/Checkers announced its intention to close at least two stores and to retrench up to 2 500 employees. The company warned SACCAWU that another 46 stores were 'under consideration' because their profit margins were too low. The company closed the two stores, one in Johannesburg and the other in Kempton Park. No workers were retrenched however, and the issue of store closures and retrenchments will be addressed in a joint negotiation. In the light of the settlement of the strike, the union is "confident that the company will approach this matter with extreme caution".

### **Victory for SACCAWU**

After a number of failed efforts to resolve the strike, settlement was finally reached on 14 June, through an 18-hour mediation/negotiation. In the settlement, Shoprite/Checkers agreed to reinstate major sections of the old recognition agreement, and to proceed with wage negotiations with SACCAWU. The company has dropped its insistence on a multi-union bargaining forum, and has therefore effectively met the union's

key demands. In turn, the company and the union have agreed to negotiate an amended recognition agreement within four months. In addition, SACCAWU won highly favourable return-to-work provisions, including anti-victimisation clauses.

The settlement raises important issues about management strategies in the 1990s. It seems that the company underestimated the strength of the union on the ground, and felt that it could

proceed with unilateral action and repressive management, without any real opposition. The strike has proven that SACCAWU is well organised, and that workers and communities are committed to defending trade union rights. Even given the unfavourable economic and political conditions, workers are prepared to act to defend their interests. SACCAWU argues that "the strike has demonstrated to big capital that, in spite of the economic crisis, workers are not prepared

to accept jobs at all costs."

The strike has also led to criticism of Shoprite/Checkers adversarial management style from various quarters. In a recent interview, Clive Weil, the former managing director of Checkers, told THE WEEKLY MAIL that he "can't understand what the management is trying to do. They are putting the entire operation at risk. You cannot hope that the workers will be committed and enthusiastic about contributing to the company's turnaround after an industrial dispute like this one. It puts the entire team effort at risk."

## Checkers bans radio station

**G**rahamstown Community Radio (GCR) was shut down earlier this month because it gave air-time to shopstewards from SACCAWU, which was involved in a dispute with Checkers.

Checkers management, from whose property the station was broadcasting, told the GCR staff that the station was "too political".

GCR joined other radio stations around the country in a May Day "switch-on" and began broadcasting from the Market Square shopping centre, which is owned by Checkers. About 90% of the broadcasting was in Xhosa and the station had started drawing a large group of listeners.

A week before the ban by Checkers Centre manager, Mr Alton Pike, the station had allowed a member of SACCAWU to explain the strike by Checkers employees. Radio station member Gcobisa Toko said management had also been asked to present their side, but declined the offer.

Mr Pike denied that the ban was linked to this incident, but confirmed that the objections were raised after the union broadcast. He said, "I have asked them not to come along any more because I have had objections from some of my tenants. They felt that the radio had been too political and that they were interfering in domestic affairs."

He said that the tenants felt that the "people" were saying political things in Xhosa. ◆

(Roger Southall)

## The strike and the law

The Shoprite/Checkers strike also raises a number of questions about South African labour legislation. One of these issues is the legal right of striking workers to picket outside the workplace. During this strike, workers had to apply to the town councils for permission to picket. This places the decision in the hands of white bureaucrats, and has the effect of limiting peaceful protest. A second legal issue concerns the proper place of minority unions in wage negotiations. This sort of issue is surely best dealt with at the national level, rather than being a source of conflict in individual companies. ☆  
(Lael Bethlehem)

## Debating flexibility at Pick 'n Pay

Meanwhile, SACCAWU faces a different set of problems at Pick 'n Pay. Earlier this year, the company entered negotiations with SACCAWU over the issue of introducing flexible working arrangements such as transfers and job rotations. SACCAWU put forward the position that it would only enter such negotiations once the flexibility arrangements which had already been unilaterally introduced at some stores were reversed. If this were to happen, the union would agree to bring its own proposals to a joint commission with management, where the issue of flexibility could be settled. According to SACCAWU organiser Lee Modiga, however, Pick 'n Pay rejected this position and began to talk of retrenching up to 3 500 employees as an alternative to flexible arrangements. The issue of retrenchments and flexibility is currently under discussion between the two parties, and they have declined to comment further, until some progress is made in the negotiation.

SACCAWU, then, faces a range of differing problems in the retail sector. On the one hand, the union must deal with adversarial industrial relations at stores such as Checkers, and face the repressive conditions associated with the apartheid economy. On the other hand, it must respond to the more sophisticated approach of a company like Pick 'n Pay. The union will have to muster both strength and innovation if it is to negotiate this difficult terrain.

● Pick 'n Pay and SACCAWU reached agreement on a 12,3% increase and a new minimum wage of R1 050. In early May, SACCAWU and OK Bazaars reached agreement on an across-the-board increase of R123 per month, with a new minimum of R950 per month. These settlements are surprisingly high, against the background of very low offers in the metal, public and other sectors. ☆  
(Lael Bethlehem)



*Into the fifth week of the strike: Da Gama workers in Mdantasane*

*Photo: Fiona Dove*

## Six week Da Gama strike settled

The six-week acrimonious dispute involving the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) and Da Gama Textiles was finally resolved on 4 May.

The dispute was settled with a wage increase of R15 across-the-board with R13 of this backdated to January. The minimum wage was increased by 15%. A further R5 increase across-the-board will be awarded in October.

SACTWU originally demanded a R40 across-the-board increase.

Wage negotiations started last October but stalemated with the conciliation board early in March after SACTWU rejected management's "final" offer of R10.

About 1 600 workers went on strike on 24 March at three Da Gama plants in East



London, Mdantsane and Zwelitsha.

In his summary of the dispute, SACTWU's regional secretary, Freddie Magugu, mentioned several factors that led to the "workers' victory". Among these was the support given the strike by the Border ANC-led Tripartite Alliance, community organisations and national, as well as international, workers' support.

"Altogether in action we were able to translate our slogan, 'an injury to one is an injury to all', into practice," said Mr Magugu. "If we had not won, our dream for a centralised bargaining forum in the textile sector would have gone down with the strike."

At the end of the strike, which involved court interdicts and dismissal threats from management, some workers were blamed for intimidation.

Magugu said the union regretted that "at least ten of our members were involved in violent incidents". ☆  
(Chris Mabuya, *Elnews*)

## National strike in the public sector?

**F**or the first time ever, there may be a national strike in the public sector this year involving 250 000 workers. Five public sector unions have established a committee of their general secretaries to co-ordinate their disputes – which may culminate in joint action in mid-July.

The Post Office and Telecommunication Workers Association (POTWA) and SA Municipal Workers Association (SAMWU) are busy with national strike ballots. The SA Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) has called off a national strike pending further negotiations. And the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and SA Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) feel they are heading for a dispute.

In the past month, there have been dozens of short stoppages, pickets, marches and demonstrations affecting teachers, postal workers, hospitals and municipalities. Tens of thousands of teachers ignored a call by their leadership not to strike and shut black schools in different regions for two weeks before returning to work. Postal workers country-wide have engaged

in short stoppages at different times. Some municipalities have come out on strike. And, under the banner of COSATU, public sector marches have been organised in all regional centres. The issue fuelling public sector workers' discontent is government's unilateral decision to grant a 5% wage increase this year. "Unilateral restructuring" and "rationalisation leading to retrenchments" are also bones of contention.

Although the 5% increase directly affects only teachers and hospital workers (who fall under public sector labour legislation), unions organising in the quasi-commercialised post, telecommunications and municipal sectors (who are covered by the Labour Relations Act) insist that a ceiling of around 5% is being applied in their sectors. They believe that this is making a mockery of genuine negotiations.

So far, teachers have responded with most militancy to the 5% increase (see p 70).

Meanwhile, SAMWU – which has never balloted for or had a national strike before – is balloting its 70 000 members in local government authorities for a national strike. SAMWU



*A SAMWU member who was beaten up by police during a demonstration in Boksburg – workers were driven into the lake and then assaulted when they tried to get out*

*Photo: William Matlala*

many more workers than its membership of around 20 000.

And in the hospital sector, NEHAWU, buoyed by its recent victory in the industrial court, where almost all its members dismissed in a national strike last year were reinstated, has also rejected the 5% wage offer outright. NEHAWU – together with other public sector staff associations – is gearing itself for possible action on

has been offered between 0% and 4,5% in its negotiations. Some of SAMWU's members are earning as little as R210 per month. SAMWU is asking for a minimum wage for the lowest grade municipal workers of R650 per month or a 30% increase – whichever is the greater. Tens of thousands of municipal workers still earn less than this.

A SAMWU strike in local government may gather support much wider than its membership. There are about 350 000 municipal workers in SA, mostly unorganised. A strike would cripple the provision of services – like garbage collection, sewerage, electricity and road maintenance – in both black and white areas.

In the post and

telecommunications sector, “spontaneous” strikes broke out recently in four branches, while this year's annual negotiations were going on. Although POTWA's leadership distanced itself from these actions (saying they were a result of worker frustrations with poor offers from employers), they appear to be part of a well co-ordinated strategy to strengthen the hand of their negotiating team. POTWA is in dispute with Telkom (who are offering 5,8%) and Sapo (who are offering 5,4%). POTWA wants a 14% increase for its members who earn less than R1 700 per month and a 10% increase for those who earn above that. Again, a strike by POTWA's members could involve

the wage issue in public hospitals.

Taken together, these disputes amount to a potentially serious crisis in the arena of public services.

Whether government will budge in the face of growing worker pressure remains to be seen – especially in the reopened negotiations with the teachers. Chances are good that both sides in these disputes will try for face-saving mechanisms that involve concessions all round – but where wage increases remain much lower than previous years and certainly much lower than the current inflation rate. If they fail, a national public sector strike could rock the state. ☆

*(Dirk Hartford)*



## Death on the mines

In an article under the headline "Sasol blamed for methane explosion at disaster mine" in the SUNDAY STAR (May 16 1993), it was stated that Sasol was shown in court to be responsible for a 1985 explosion at Middlebult mine.

In fact, the court found two Sasol employees guilty of contravening safety regulations. The day the courts prosecute a mine – that is, mine management – for negligence will herald a new era in the enforcement of mine safety legislation.

One year after the Middlebult disaster, 177 miners suffocated in the fumes of a polyurethane fire at Kinross Mine. The inquiry into the Kinross disaster lasted only three hours and the National Union of Mineworkers, which lost 60 members in the blaze, was denied the opportunity to cross-question witnesses.

Nearly a year later, in a trial at the regional court in Witbank, a lowly mine official, a trackman, was fined R100 for breaking safety regulations. The mine manager was not prosecuted. He ignored warnings circulated by the Chamber of Mines about the dangers of polyurethane and he contracted the company which sprayed the walls of the haulage tunnel with polyurethane foam. The company which installed the

deadly lining was not prosecuted, nor was the chemist who designed the "fire-retardent" foam. No, the blame lay with Viviers, who illegally used a welding torch to repair a broken conveyor track in the ill-fated tunnel!

In 1987, 34 workers were killed in a methane gas explosion at Ermelo coalmine. The inquest-inquiry delivered a finding of

negligence and, although managers were fined for breaking regulations, they were acquitted in the trial which followed.

In 1988, there was another polyurethane fire. This time, seven workers at Western Deep Levels died. At the inquest-inquiry, the most senior manager claimed ignorance of Chamber warnings, as did his

### Mine Disaster Kills 53

Fifty three mine workers were killed in the Methane Explosion at Sasol's Middlebult Colliery in Secunda on 13 May. Many were CWIU members. The union called for commemoration services at all workplaces, and put forward the following demands, among others:

1. Trade Unions and their members have a legitimate interest in negotiating health and safety issues and to this end their health and safety representatives need to be recognised in the law and in the workplace.
2. The Workman's Compensation Commissioner must stop giving money to NOSA (National Occupational Safety Association).



*A priest conducts a memorial service organised by chemical workers at Propan Chemicals*

*Photo: William Matlala*

3. An acceptable substitute for NOSA must be found so that trade unions and employers can have a system of measuring workplace health and safety which has credibility with both employers and trade unions.
4. Government funding must be available to raise health and safety standards in South Africa. ♦

counterpart at Kinross in 1986. The court refused to call the environmental manager who was directly responsible for mine safety. No one was found negligent.

The list of examples which exonerate mine management and/or find no one at fault, is virtually endless. Nearly every manager implicated in an accident has been able to argue successfully that he could not possibly be held responsible for the circumstances leading to the accident. But the Minerals' Act states, very clearly, that a mine manager is responsible for safety. It also, very unambiguously, sets out the legal responsibilities of subordinate managers.

Yet the Mine Inspectorate and the courts have never posed the question: "What is it about the organisation of work on the mines that causes a minor transgression of the regulations to precipitate a disaster?" When will the inspectorate and the courts conclude that mine management is responsible

for the organisation and implementation of work?

The nonsense published in the annual reports of mining houses are indicative of the malaise in the industry:

□ "Most mines in the group were again successful in the field of safety achievement.

Unfortunately an explosion took place on the 31 August 1987 at St Helena Number 10 Shaft where 63 workers lost their lives"; and

□ "Excluding Kinross (1986) and St Helena (1987) disasters, fatalities decreased by 12 percent in 1987."

*(Gencor annual report of 1987)*

The latest disaster at Sasol's Middlebult colliery in Secunda, in which 53 miners were killed, seems to have finally tipped the balance. At last the government has appointed the Commission of Inquiry into Safety and Health in the Mining Industry. What a terrible, terrible pity it did not do this years ago! ☆  
*(May Hermanus)*

about restructuring unless they are forced to do so by law.

NUM wants a new law to give workers real rights whenever they face company plans to "restructure". The proposed law has two parts:

Part one says that any company that wants to make significant changes in the way it operates has to negotiate the process with the workers and their unions. This will apply to new technology and work processes, to rationalisation following mergers or relocation as well as to proposed retrenchments. If a company makes changes without a negotiated agreement, the management can be tried in court and fined.

Part two applies if retrenchment is unavoidable. In this case, the company has to negotiate a "social plan" with the workers and the unions. The social plan will reduce the bad effects of retrenchment for the individual workers. It will provide for:

- a minimum severance package
- fair notice and full rights to information
- re-training financed by the company to help workers find new jobs
- retrenchment counselling.

The Social Plan Act is not up for negotiation in any forum. It should be adopted as Alliance policy and marked down as the first law to be passed by a new, democratically elected government. ☆  
*(Martin Nicol, NUM)*

## NUM's 'Social Plan Act' proposal

**M**oratorium on retrenchments! Stop unilateral restructuring! These key COSATU slogans are up for negotiation in various forums, at both industry and national level.

NUM has come up with a new proposal to address these issues. This is based on two

realities. In declining sectors we cannot stop retrenchments – the best we can do is to manage the process. Even in expanding sectors, growth may depend on new work processes that employ fewer people. Secondly, employers will never agree to negotiate

## Participation, productivity, retrenchments: Seifsa IR survey 1993

**T**he Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of SA, commissioned THE INNES LABOUR BRIEF to undertake its first survey of industrial relations in the steel and engineering industry.

The survey of industrial relations trends was conducted by means of a questionnaire distributed to all Seifsa member companies (2 760) in Oct 1992. 500 companies (18%) responded. The majority (59%) were "large" companies (51 workers or more). The survey covers the following areas :-

### Centralised bargaining

75% of respondents want centralised bargaining to continue, while 23% are opposed to it. Most opposition comes from Natal, although the majority of Natal opponents (64%) are in favour of regional bargaining. 72% of small, 80% of medium, and 74% of large companies support centralised bargaining. 33% of companies presently bargain at plant level – 61% of these on wages.

### Retrenchments

Between Jan 1989 and Dec 1992, 110 000 jobs were lost in the industry. 34 000 were lost between Oct 1991 and Sept 1992. 35% of companies surveyed retrenched workers in the same period.

In the survey, most retrenchments were in the large companies in the PWV

region. 82% of retrenching companies retrenched unskilled workers. There were 37 different packages for workers (from no package upwards), with the most common being one week's wage per year of service.

73% of retrenching companies consulted with unions.



*Metal workers on strike in 1992*

*Photo: William Matlala*

### Strikes

25% of Seifsa companies lost man-days due to strike action (including the national wage strike in Aug 1992) during the period. 77% of strikes were in the PWV, mainly in large companies.

Wage disputes accounted for 75% of strikes, followed by external issues (28%) and retrenchments (12%). 68% of strikes were illegal. 91% of strikes involved unions – 73% involving NUMSA, either singly or with other unions.

### Affirmative action

39% of surveyed companies claim an affirmative action policy. All these companies were large or medium sized. Of those who have a policy, 93% base it on equal opportunity, while only 5% base it on preferential treatment.

36% of companies target blacks in their policy, while 35% target blacks and women. 0,5% target women only.

The majority of companies argue that the main obstacle to implementation is the shortage of appropriate candidates and skills.

### Productivity

46% of surveyed companies (mostly large) have a productivity scheme. Of these, 59% use performance bonuses, 36% use incentives and 32% use other productivity schemes. Only 31% of companies with schemes discussed them with a union. Those who reported discussion with a union also reported the most effective schemes.

### Participative management

19% of surveyed companies (mostly large) have participative management schemes. 73% of such companies believe the schemes to be effective.

18 different schemes were reported – including green areas (14%), works councils (7%), quality circles (4%), canteen committees, safety

## LABOUR ACTION

committees, cell leaders, Labour Link, value meetings and information sharing networks. 55% of respondents with schemes did not specify what they were.

Of the companies with schemes, only 45% have discussed or agreed to these with a union.

### Training

75% of companies (mostly large) believe there is a need for more or better training. However, only 57% are committing resources to training. These are mostly in the high tech industries based in the PWV.

### Workplace violence

Only 14% of companies reported experiencing incidents of violence in the workplace – with Natal and the PWV reporting most incidents. 47% of these reported the violence was strike or dispute related.

25% of companies reported they are taking steps to deal with violence – eg counselling services, safe transport, facilitation/mediation, calling in the police and involving the Peace Accord structures.

### Recommendations

The report recommends to employers to:

- Keep centralised bargaining in place
- Standardise retrenchment procedures and packages
- Take more active steps in affirmative action
- Pay more attention to

improving productivity in consultation with the workforce

- Formulate approaches to participative management because a future ANC government will attach great importance to this
- Commit more resources to training, including that of numeracy and literacy
- Prepare for the possibility of increased workplace violence as SA moves towards elections. ☆

(Jane Barrett)

## NMC report 1992

This 72-page document reviews both labour-related matters in general and the restructuring and activities of the National Manpower Commission in particular.

The following summarises some of the most interesting information in the report:

### Labour relations

A tripartite committee is due to formulate recommendations on how to implement the recommendations of the ILO fact finding mission on freedom of association which visited SA in early 1992. A committee to investigate the functioning of the Industrial Court has also been established. Discussions on the harmonisation of labour legislation in the TBVC states and self governing territories also got under way in 1992. Draft legislation for the public sector was produced. (Note –

major objections to the legislation have been raised by public sector unions.)

At the end of 1992, there were 194 registered trade unions with a total membership of 2,9 million (22,9% of the Economically Active Population (EAP) and 57% of the labour force falling under the LRA). Of these, 1,2 million were in COSATU.

Agreements of note that were reached include the following: a moratorium on retrenchments and a profit sharing scheme on some mines; a tripartite agreement on restructuring the textile industry; a collective bargaining fund on some mines; wage increases calculated on actual wage scales, not minimums, in the metal industry; a joint trust to finance the training of retrenched workers in the metal industry; and a training and counselling fund for retrenched workers in the motor manufacturing industry.

In 1992, there were 87 industrial councils covering 187 agreements and 735 000 workers.

Between Nov 1991 and Dec 1992, there were 14 698 applications for conciliation boards, 4 639 of which ended in deadlock, and 2 268 of which were settled. There were 467 private mediations and 488 arbitrations in the first ten months of 1992.

833 strikes involving 149 556 workers and costing 1,9m labour days were reported in 1992.

6 042 applications to the

Industrial Court were made in 1992, a slight decrease from 1991. Important judgements were made on severance pay, prohibition of overtime, representation at disciplinary hearings, strike ballots, granting of compensation by the Industrial Court, dismissal of striking workers and dismissal for misconduct. Many of the judgements were not favourable to workers.

The report identifies affirmative action, centralised bargaining, training and co-determination as key demands for the foreseeable future.

### Labour: supply and demand

The total population of South Africa and the TBVC states was 38 million in 1991.

The EAP (including the TBVC states) was 12,7 million in 1991 (34% of the total population), with women constituting 39% of the EAP. 300 000 people enter the labour market every year, but between 1981 and 1991 only 15 000 jobs were created in the formal economy per annum. This means only 5% of new entrants are employed in the formal economy every year. If the informal sector is excluded, the total number unemployed is estimated to be 4,9 million (39% of EAP). The informal sector accounts for at least 2,5 million people, and accounts for 75% of new jobs created.

Aids is identified in the report as having a potentially significant effect on the supply of labour, with an estimate of fatalities of between 197 000

## Inflation

Consumer Price Index  
(1990=100)

Annual rate of inflation  
(% increase over 1 year)

### Area

Mar 1993

Mar 92 - 93

Cape Town	141.1	10.3%
Port Elizabeth	139.3	10.1%
East London	140.5	10.8%
Durban	136.3	8.7%
Pietermaritzburg	141.9	10.0%
Witwatersrand	139.6	8.6%
Vaal Triangle	134.1	8.6%
Pretoria	139.9	11.1%
Klerksdorp	139.2	9.8%
Bloemfontein	136.5	11.4%
OFS Goldfields	141.9	12.4%
Kimberley	141.9	12.7%
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>139.6</b>	<b>9.7%</b>

### Area

Apr 1992

Apr 92 - 93

Cape Town	144.7	11.2%
Port Elizabeth	143.0	11.3%
East London	144.1	12.1%
Durban	139.7	10.0%
Pietermaritzburg	145.4	11.2%
Witwatersrand	143.2	10.6%
Vaal Triangle	138.0	10.7%
Pretoria	143.2	11.7%
Klerksdorp	142.9	11.2%
Bloemfontein	140.2	13.1%
OFS Goldfields	145.4	13.7%
Kimberley	145.8	14.7%
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>143.1</b>	<b>11.0%</b>

Source: Labour Research Service/CSS

and 435 000 by the year 2000.

While labour productivity increased in 1992, this was largely due to retrenchments and downscaling rather than as a result of actual improvements in productivity.

The average wage increase for the first ten months of 1992 was 12,6%, with inflation being 14,7%.

There are 23 registered training boards, with another 20 awaiting accreditation.

### Comment

This is a useful reference document, spoiled a little by value-laden comments slipped in on centralised bargaining (a subtle suggestion that it may lead to uncompetitiveness), contracting out (as a means of encouraging small enterprise), and on productivity (the necessity of linking this to wages). ☆

(Jane Barrett)

# DURBAN STRIKES



1973



In December 1972, the then Nationalist Party government Minister of Labour, Marais Viljoen, said the following:

*"We believe there is no place for the Bantu in the existing trade union movement because his needs are adequately catered for in the existing system ...There is no reason for change whatsoever. ...The organisation of African workers is neither in the interests of South Africa, nor in the interests of improving their own wage position, nor in the interests of promoting race relations."*

One month later, workers at Coronation Bricks downed tools – and the 1973 strikes had begun. The modern labour movement in South Africa was born.

Now it 1993. What has been achieved in the factories after twenty years of labour struggle? And what are the new challenges facing workers in the workplace today?

LABOUR BULLETIN team KARL VON HOLDT and WILLIAM MATLALA went to Natal to find out.



S'BU KHWELA of the Natal Worker History Project\* interviews workers who participated and sifts through newspaper clippings to tell the story of the Natal strikes twenty years ago.

# 1973 strikes: *breaking the silence*

*"Ufil' umuntu, ufil usadikiza – a person is dead, but the spirit lives on ... "*  
*These words marked the beginning of trouble for the bosses in South Africa.*

**M**ore than 2 000 African workers from the Coronation Brick and Tile Company chanted these words of anger as they gathered in the playground at plant number 1 to demand a wage increase. It was the morning of 9 January, the start of the 1973 Natal strike wave.

The previous afternoon management had circulated pamphlets in Zulu warning workers that rumours of an impending strike had reached them, and that ringleaders would be severely punished. The company blamed the strike call on "communist agitators".

The intimidation was in vain. It seems workers knew nothing about an impending strike action. Some workers did not even see the company's warning pamphlet.

When the strike began, a few workers were already at work. They only became aware of the strike action when their colleagues from the main plant at Briardene called them out. One worker says he arrived at work to find the place empty. A

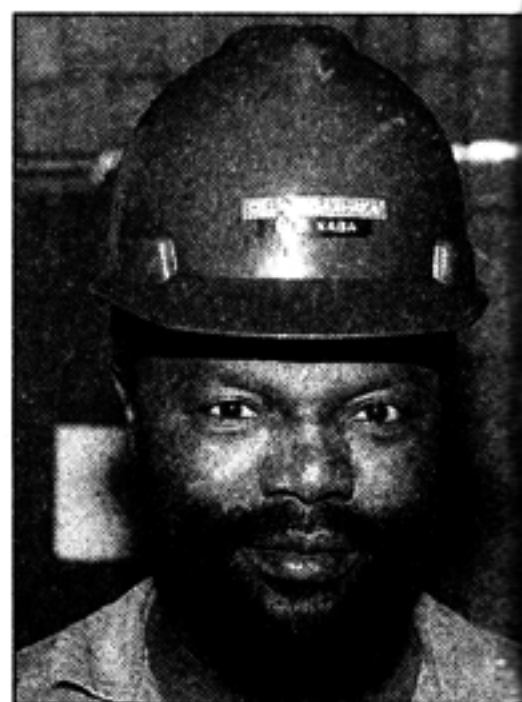
manager told him about the strike.

To this day workers don't know any communist agitators nor can they name the individual who first mooted the idea of the strike. Workers say money, or lack thereof, was the issue behind the strike, and not communist agitators.

## *Sifun' imali*

When the Coronation Brick and Tile managers came to tell the workers to go back to work on that critical day in January 1973, workers shouted: "We want money". It seems they had not discussed among themselves what increase they wanted. Some shouted "two rand", others "twenty rand" and yet others "thirty rand".

The situation was aggravated by the lack



*20 years on: Johnson Xaba, a worker at Coronation in 1973*

*Photo: William Matla*

\* NWHP is an oral history project based at the University of Natal, Durban.





King Goodwill Zwelithini addresses Coronation workers

Photo: LHM – NNC

of a spokesperson to present workers' grievances to management. Workers say if there had been communication channels, the strike might have been averted. As it was, management could not talk to thousands of workers and workers would not elect a committee to represent them. They were scared those elected to the committee would be victimised.

A young man by the name of Nathaniel Zulu volunteered to speak. He committed himself to anything that could happen, even dismissal. At first he spoke from the midst of a crowd of workers, with a balaclava on to hide his identity. It wasn't until King Zwelithini of the Zulus came that workers agreed to elect a committee.\* The king was the only leader who came to their assistance. Wages and working conditions were negotiated and the strike ended on its second day.

But the king's arrival was controversial. He had visited Coronation and other companies in Durban the previous year to ask for wage increases. Press reports that management had called the king to stop the strike caused concern within the KwaZulu government that the king had sided with the bosses. However

workers at Coronation, many of whom hailed from KwaNongoma, the king's home, deny all those allegations. They say they met the king when they were marching from Avoca to Briardene and told him what had happened. The king then asked them to go to their compounds, promising he would speak to management on their behalf the following day.

### 'Coronation has done it, so why can't we?'

At 7am the next day workers at AJ Keeler, a transport company in Durban, went on strike demanding higher wages. Workers rejected a 50-cents-a-week pay rise. Management refused a larger increase, arguing that the company was paying R2 more than the government minimum. The strike lasted 45 minutes only.

Another strike broke out at TW Beckett and Company, a tea firm in Durban. Workers wanted an increase of R3 a week. Management would not talk to workers, and called in the police. More than 100 workers were sacked when they refused to return to work. The company was reported to be operating with a skeleton staff and a total shutdown on some machinery. A week later workers were called back for possible reinstatement, but the "ringleaders" were sacked.

The strike epidemic was like an avalanche rolling from the coast inland. About 100 ship painters and cleaners went on strike at JH Akitt and Company in Durban on 15 January. Workers demanded a R30-per-week increase. They were paid R2,60 a day and had been promised R3,50. Commented Akitt, the manager: "They can wait until Doomsday, they will never get it." The following morning strikers gathered outside the company offices. They were dispersed by police when their employer complained they were "becoming a nuisance". Ship painting and cleaning was seriously affected. One of the shipping companies, James Brown and Hammer, had contracts to finish but had to wait for the 'Doomsday' on which workers would return.

\* Nathaniel Zulu remained active in the company liaison committee, and later organised an in-house union at Corobrick (formerly Coronation) where he is still active today.

There were rumours that the ship painting companies were considering using convict labour to replace striking workers. A spokesperson for the companies said: "I don't know who mooted this idea first, but it was worth considering ... it is worth looking into the idea of using convict labour – they are used by the Railways to clean up the harbour." (THE DAILY NEWS, 16 January 1973)

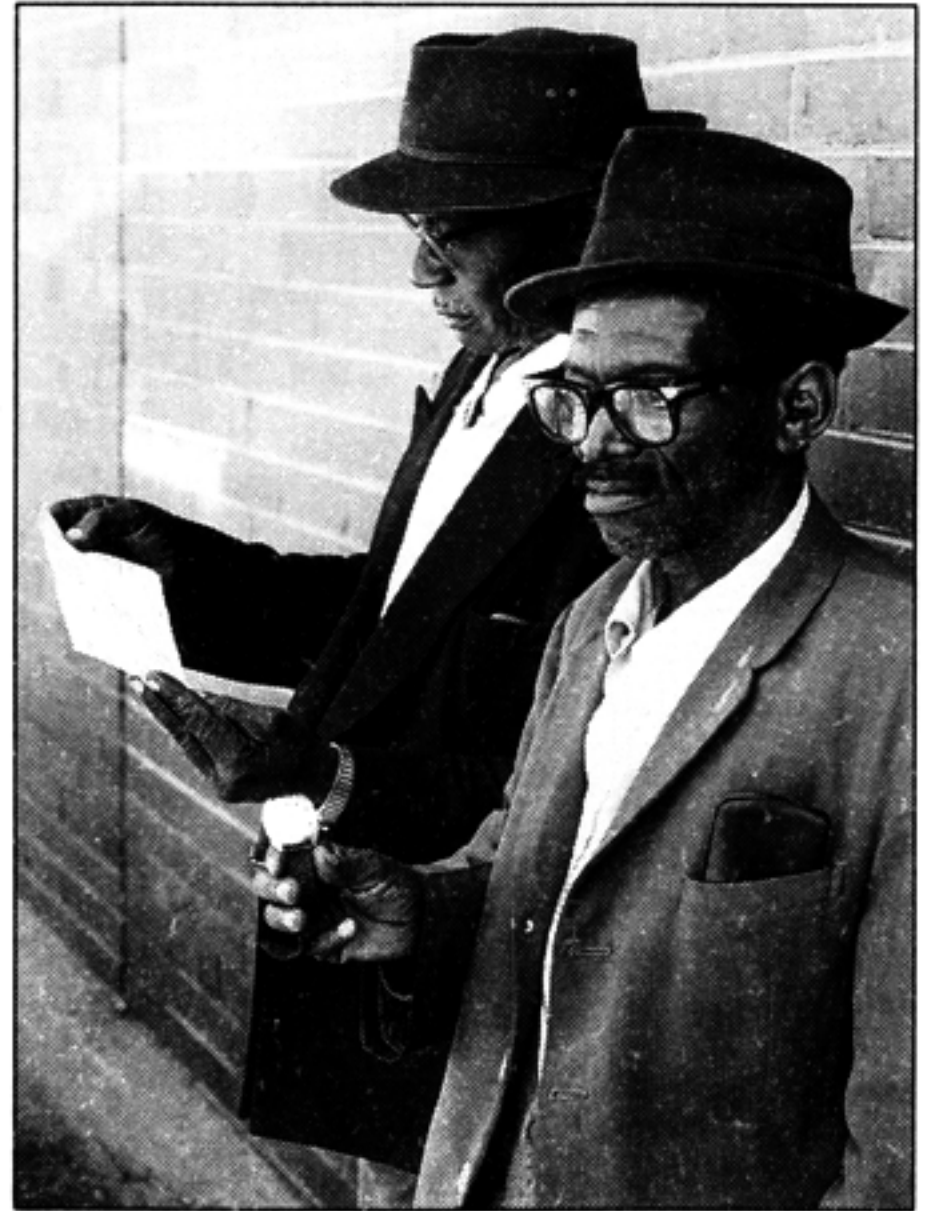
### Drivers' strike

At Motor Via in Pinetown drivers stopped work and started picketing on the morning of 22 January, demanding a R40-a-week wage. Drivers complained there was no guaranteed work and therefore no guaranteed wage. There were times when there would be no work at all in a week, and therefore no pay. Conditions at the factory were bad. Drivers were only paid for the trips they had taken. They claimed they had individual contracts with the company guaranteeing R15 a week, but they often earned less than that. The following day the managing director offered increases of between 75c and R3 a trip, depending on the destination.

Workers changed their demand from the R40 they had initially requested to a R15 guaranteed weekly wage and a minimum of R5 per trip. They rejected managements' offer. The 275 drivers who were subsequently sacked ignored the dismissals. They called on Indian and senior African staff to join them. Replacement drivers brought in from the company's Bloemfontein and Pretoria depots also joined the striking Pinetown drivers.

The strike entered its third day. The MD complained the company was losing thousands of rands. He continued negotiating with drivers through his indunas. On that day, a five-person delegation of workers lodged a complaint about their dismissal and working conditions with the Pinetown Bantu Administration. The workers carried 122 reference books collected from picketing workers. The Bantu Administration director confirmed the existence of the minimum wage contracts.

Workers do not recall how this strike, or the one at JH Akitt, ended.



*1973 wages: Phineas Ndaba (58 at the time) worked for the same Durban company for 35 years (the silver watch is for long service) – in 1973 his wages after deductions came to R7,50 per week!*

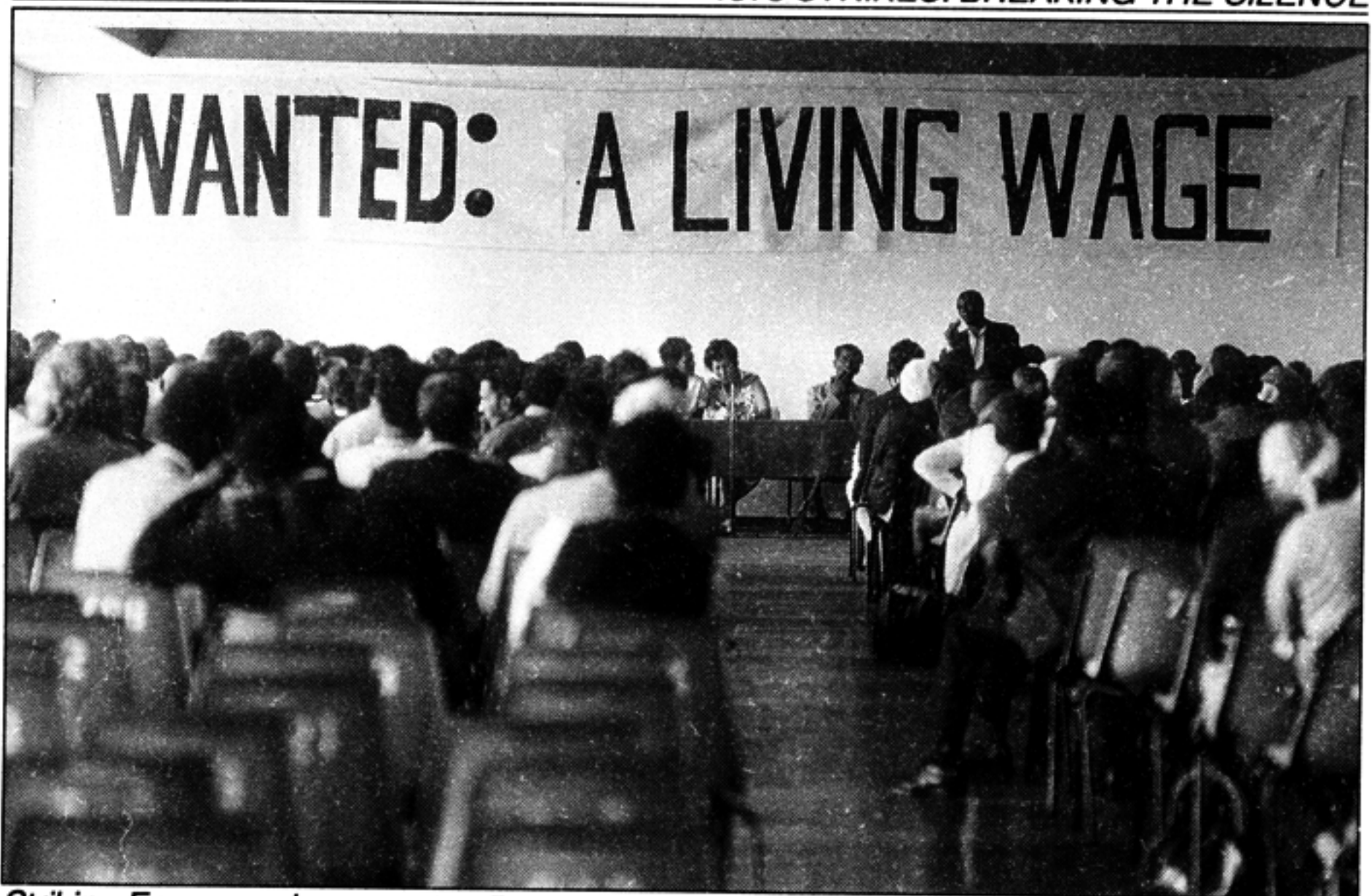
*Photo: LHM – NNC*

### Rolling strike action

More than 100 companies were reported to have been affected by the strikes in less than three months in Natal alone, mainly in the Durban/Pinetown region. Hammarsdale, Pietermaritzburg, Tongaat, Charlestown, Mandini and Richard's Bay were all affected.

The speed at which the strikes took place was startling. Every boss in Natal was on the alert. Everyone was left shivering including the bosses. Wages paid to African workers were those recommended by the Wage Board. Government legislation made any strike by workers illegal. The bosses refused to negotiate and threatened to invoke the labour legislation.

When the problems escalated, the bosses blamed the government for its legislation. The government, in turn, said the bosses had failed to handle their employees appropriately. The then Minister of Labour, Marais Viljoen, said even though wages for African workers were



*Striking Frame workers meet at Bolton Hall for a report-back on negotiations with management. (Bolton Hall was the headquarters of the Garment Workers Industrial Union, a TUCSA affiliate – they made their facilities available to striking textile workers even though they were not members of the union)*

*Photo: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection*

determined by the Wage Board, there was no law preventing employers from paying higher wages (THE DAILY NEWS, 14 January 1973).

### **Strikes at Frame**

About two hours after they had started work on 25 January 1973, workers on the 6am shift at Frametex in New Germany, Pinetown, downed tools. Workers demanded an increase in their basic wages, which were about R6 a week.

The Frame Group was notorious for its starvation wages. "The textile industry paid the lowest wages. Within the textile industry, Frame was the worst," says Obed Zuma, who worked for Frametex and was later elected general secretary of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW).

The strikes spread from Frametex to other plants of the Frame Group in New Germany and Jacobs – Seltex, Pinetex, Feltex, Texfin, Ultex, Natal Underwear Manufacturers, Natal Knitting Mills and the Consolidated

Woolwashing and Processing Mill. More than 7 000 workers took part in the strike.

Whenever chaos erupted in one plant, the others would be informed and the entire complex would go on strike.

Besides wages, working conditions were not good at Frame. As one woman worker recalls: "Whenever you went on maternity that meant you had retrenched yourself. The manager could dismiss you whenever he liked for no reason."

Frame employed many women who were paid far lower wages than male workers. "Frame used to employ men only. As time went on men were retrenched and replaced with women because they were cheap labour," says Zuma. Frame workers also had the problems all African workers had ... there was no way they could communicate their demands and dissatisfaction to management. They had no confidence in the internally elected liaison committee. Says Dolly Dlungwana, who worked for Frame from 1960:



*Militant municipal workers take to the streets*

*Photo: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection*

“We always had a problem when we wanted to communicate our problems to management because the liaison committee was the mouth of the bosses. We had no spokesperson.”

When Frame workers went on strike, they called Barney Dladla, a councillor for community affairs in the KwaZulu government. He led them on foot from the Clermont stadium to the Frame premises in New Germany, only to find that they had been locked out. That did not stop Dladla. Management ultimately opened for him. Zuma remembers: “Barney would address workers, hear their grievances and then present them to the bosses. Negotiations would then take place.” After Dladla had spoken to management, Frame workers got increases, though not as much as they had demanded.

Dladla\* blamed the government for the wave of strikes in Natal. “I blame the Republican government for not allowing my people to organise themselves into trade unions and for failing to lay a Poverty Datum Line wage

structure. Because of this, the only way my people can attract attention to their plight is by downing tools.” (NATAL MERCURY, 27 March 1973)

### **The municipal workers’ strike**

Some services came to a halt in the city of Durban on 5 February when 3 000 African workers of the Durban Corporation went on strike. They were demanding a R10 increase to their R13 average basic weekly wage. Strikers allegedly threatened to burn down the offices of the city engineer’s department unless African clerks stopped work. A spokesperson from this office told workers the city council would be meeting the following day to discuss wage increases. The city council also called on the Department of Labour to help settle the strike.

The following day workers were offered a R2 increase. They rejected this offer and were joined by another 13 000 workers. All operations in the city were paralysed because

\* Dladla was very soon removed from his position by the KwaZulu government and replaced by Solomon Ngobese, a man rejected by workers.



*Durban's City Engineer tells municipal workers they have been granted a minimum increase of R2 per week as the acting mayor looks on*

*Photo: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection*

the African workers who were on strike worked for the electricity and water departments. Their job was to clean the whole city, build and repair roads, and provide electricity and water. They worked at the municipal market, at the cemetery, the abattoir, and delivered milk to white families.

The most essential services were badly affected. There was no one to remove litter. Toilets were left to stink. Parks became bushes. The supply of meat, fruit and vegetables was affected. Funerals were delayed, with no one to dig the graves. Some whites volunteered to do some petty work at the market and were compensated with beer.

### **Action beyond the borders**

The influence of the Durban strikes went beyond South Africa's borders. A Zulu-speaking crew working for a British cargo ship, the Clan Robertson, also went on strike over higher wages while docked in Gothenburg in Sweden. They were paid wages far below those of their British colleagues. Some were earning R34 a month, while British sailors were earning more than

R200 a month. Owners of the Clan Robertson, the British and Commonwealth Shipping Company, refused to discuss the wages of the black South African crew. They had to leave Sweden and come back to South Africa.

The Clan Robertson strike sparked concern about British companies operating in South Africa. Adam Raphael, the *GUARDIAN*'s correspondent in South Africa noted: "In too many cases British companies operating in South Africa appear to have slipped back a hundred years and to be following a code of conduct they would never dare to apply in Britain ... There is surely an obligation on British companies to do more in South Africa than merely reap larger and larger profits for their shareholders." (*THE DAILY NEWS*, 19 March 1973)

British companies used racist South African labour policy to exploit African workers in South Africa. The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) called for a halt to British immigration to South Africa and boycotted British companies which sent whites to their plants in South Africa. The AAM campaigned to stop



*Participants at an Institute for Industrial Education workshop – the IIE played an important role in educating newly-organised workers in the period following the 1973 strikes*

*Photo: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection*

loans to South Africa and exposed companies with vested interests in racist exploitation. It called for a boycott of British companies which continued to involve themselves in South African industry.

The British government urged British companies operating in South Africa to improve wages and labour opportunities of black workers “without transgressing South African legislation”.

The Durban strikes occurred at a very bad time in South Africa. The ANC and PAC had been banned 13 years before. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), the only non-racial trade union federation, had gone underground. There were no unions for African workers. Living and working conditions were bad and wages were low.

### **Bosses blame the strikes on agitators**

The strikes demonstrated worker spontaneity. There is no evidence of anyone inciting workers to strike. There are, however, cases

where organisers were reported to have been seen before workers went on strike.

The Wages Commission at the University of Natal was implicated in the strikes. Some employers thought the strikes were a result of a power struggle between the KwaZulu government and the King of the Zulus. Others thought King Zwelithini was exploiting the wage gap in Natal to be acknowledged as the Great Defender by the people (this emerged from a symposium organised by the Institute of Personnel Management on 14 March 1973 on “how to avoid and deal with strikes”).

The strikes, which started as a struggle for wages, developed into a struggle for trade union recognition. Trade unions formed in 1973-4 were the National Union of Textile Workers, the Metal and Allied Workers Union, Furniture and Timber Workers Union, Chemical Workers Industrial Union and the Transport and General Workers Union. This was only the beginning of the long hard battle for union recognition, and to build a powerful labour movement. ☆



SAMUEL MTHETHWA, chairperson of the NUMSA shopstewards at Dunlop, spoke to KARL VON HOLDT about his participation in the 1973 strikes, about organisation at Dunlop, and about a management which "has not changed".

## **SAMUEL MTHETHWA** *twenty years of struggle*

### ***Where were you in 1973 and what was happening?***

In 1973 I was not employed at Dunlop. I was working for Durban Engineering at Jacobs. I participated in some action at that time. There were about 200 workers in the company. We had a strike for about one week. When the company gave an ultimatum we said, look our jobs are in danger. Because at that time, unions were not that strong, it was just the beginning of the unions.

### ***So you did not win the demands?***

Well, they gave us very little but it was not the same as people who did not do anything. We would not have got that little if we did not participate. In that company there was no organisation. It was something that came at that time, there was nothing before. When I left Durban Engineering in 1974 the union was beginning to organise.

### ***What were the conditions like in the factories? What was it that made***

### ***people feel they were struggling and must go on strike?***

It is not easy to say exactly what was the condition of employment. At that time we did not know what was forcing us to do what, except to say when you got a job in a factory you just had to listen to what your boss was saying and nothing else.

When the strikes began at other factories with people wanting more money, we also realised that we were getting less. We needed to get more, like everyone. The money that we were getting at that time was too little. At that time when one tells you what your rights were you could not even recognise them.

Today you will find that it is the young people who are militant, who always want to make things happen. I remember one of the people was very old, Mr Nzimande, and he was very active. It was not the young people only. When that thing happened everyone was just saying no, we want money.

Mr Nzimande did not have any position



*Samuel Mthethwa, Dunlop shopsteward and worker leader*

*Photo: William Matlala*

was the one who was recruiting inside.

***What was the response of the bosses when workers downed tools and said, we want higher wages?***

Firstly they sent their indunas and the foremen to tell us that we are not going to get what we want and they will not be pressurised by us and they will not talk and they want us to get back to work. We resisted until they sent the indunas to say, tell these people that we can only give so much, but they must go back to work.

Some kind of negotiations started there and that is when Nzimande took part and said, yes we understand what the management is offering but that is too little. At least we can consider it if they can give so much. In our case we said we want 50 cents, then we can go back. Of

course at that time 50 cents was too big. The employers were coming with 7 cents.

My wage was R18,40 but that was the highest. On top of that I was going to get 7 cents per hour.

***In 1975 when you came to Dunlop, what kind of situation did you find there, how would you describe that?***

In Dunlop at that time there was nothing happening organisationally. There were just people called counsellors who were the speakers for the workers. But they did not do that because they were just called and told and went back to tell the workers. We lived in that situation until 1982 when MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers Union) came and organised in that company.

amongst the workers. He was just an ordinary worker and, when this thing happened, he just stood up and took initiative. When people were getting together he conducted the meetings, and made people come together.

***Was that simply because he was such a person, or do you think that he had some organisational experience or something that helped him to do that?***

As far as I remember he was an illiterate, he could not even read or write English. He was an ordinary person but he was very active.

When the union came in 1974 he was the one organising because he said he has seen the reaction of employers against the workers and you could see that he wanted to help workers. In fact he became like an inside organiser. He



Well, there were old guys also at that time. I could remember Mr Khumalo and Mr Khanyile who were active in organising for unions to come in. Then there was resistance from the company and it took a long time. People realised that they were being oppressed, they were joining, because MAWU at that time had a very good strategy of organising. I remember on a chosen day it used to bring all Natal organisers to one company that was targeted.

They came to the gate, the employers and the police were chasing them away saying they should not be next to the company, they should be right over the road. But they were issuing pamphlets inviting the workers to their offices. Workers began to join. In early 1983 we then had a majority and introduced the union to management.

***If you look at the current situation, and you think back how it was when you came, how do you see the position now?***

Well, in Dunlop I see it in two ways, one way on the workers' side. If I compare the workers they are now much clearer than they were before about what is happening in the country, in general politics, in economics, in history. But when I look at employers' attitude towards the workers, whether they have changed or not, I would say nothing has changed in Dunlop. The people that were the directors of the company are still directors of the company today. I would say those directors are still as before, they have not changed at all.

In Dunlop not a single year ends without a



*1973 strikes in the Jacobs area, Durban: with no union to speak through, five fingers means 'Five Rands more!'*

*Photo: Local History Museum – Natal Newspapers Collection*

strike or three or four days of stoppages. When people know their rights they have to enforce that right, and management will always resist. People have to embark on action.

***Did you act last year as well?***

We did not get our year end bonus, just because we went on strike for the same things. The management dismissed a guy unfairly and workers went on strike.

Then, when we discussed the issue with the management, management did not want to admit that they were wrong. It was clear, in fact management had breached the procedures. They could see clearly that they were wrong and they brought the dismissed worker back.

So we said workers should not lose money for striking. The workers were saying, look you have made us lose money for your mistake. You knew it was wrong because the top management was saying the shopfloor management was wrong. We said we should not be penalised for the management problems. So that is why the strike stretched over two weeks for that demand. The company refused to pay us for that.

## INTERVIEW

**When Comrade Mlazi (see box on this page) was saying, because of the economic situation, the union is weaker now and management can see that and is trying to push workers back. How do you see it?**

I won't say workers are weak. It is a normal thing that, when there is a demand for production, the workers become stronger because they have their weapon with them. When you strike, it is easy for management to talk seriously. I am saying the workers are not weak because we have been on short time for almost three years, but we have been able to go out to face management.

I would say, even today, the workers are

still in a position to take action if there is a need for that.

**Has management introduced any worker participation projects at Dunlop?**

We do not see that much participation in Dunlop except to say we are forcing management to consult us if there are any changes going to take place. But at the moment they just consult in order for us to understand. We are still fighting against that. There is no structure that has been established where we are participating in some other programmes. Workers want participation because we know that it is needed to work together because all

## A symbol of intransigence

**D**unlop has become a symbol of intransigence. According to shopsteward Ian Mlazi, "We have to fight all the time. There is nothing that we negotiate with them and get it without pushing them hard". Last year the union tabled a range of wage and non wage demands. The only issue that reached settlement was wages. "For example, we wanted a long service allowance," says shopsteward chair Samuel Mthethwa. "That was rejected as a communist idea".

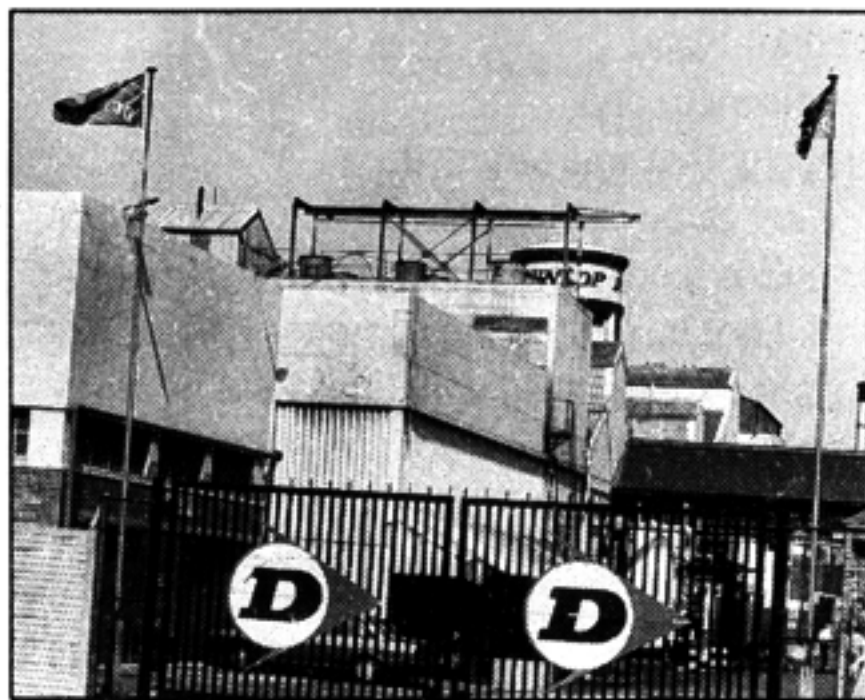
Dunlop is the only tyre manufacturer in South Africa that remains outside the industrial council for the industry, and flatly refuses to contemplate joining. According to Samuel Mthethwa, two years ago shopstewards from all Dunlop factories (the company also manufactures sportswear and equipment) passed a resolution for Dunlop to be nationalised "because it is intransigent and eats the fruits of production alone".

Like the whole tyre industry, Dunlop is under pressure from the recession and the threat of removing import protection. There are about 1 200 workers at the plant and 926 are union members. Workers have been on short time for three years. Mlazi says workers are not sure whether this is caused by the economy or if it is a management tactic to weaken the union. He believes the same number of tyres is being produced, as workers work faster to earn bonuses to make up the pay lost through short time.

The shopstewards say only one department, which produces steel belt radials for trucks, has new technology. A production manager told them that the survival of the company depends on this department succeeding in the market.

"We have written to the company head office requesting a meeting to discuss deeply the company's future," says Mthethwa. ♦

● Management refused a request for an interview.



parties need one another. Even in the new South Africa there will still be workers. We wish to participate because we want to learn how things are being done, so that if need be we will be able to do things without certain people of management deciding for all the people. Today we are saying we should move away from the old style where we were saying the employers are the enemy of workers. We need to know what the management is doing so that we can learn and be able to do it ourselves.

***Do you think that management at Dunlop is ready for the new South Africa?***

The answer is no. When you discuss with those young men of management you could hear they are prepared to adapt to the situation of today, but of course they do not have powers to implement any new ideas. They are there just to take the ruling from the door. Now those directors of Dunlop, I do not think that they even talk or think about change.

***You said that in the early 80s the union would target a factory and all the organisers would come. Speaking as a shopsteward, how do you think that the union has changed over all these years compared to the past?***

This is a hard question. I do not have a clear answer in my mind. In MAWU, when the union was small, it was easy. When you telephoned the office, you found the organisers, you discussed the issue with them, and it was easy to arrange a meeting with the employers. But today, in NUMSA (formed by a merger between MAWU and other metal unions), your diaries are always full and people working for the unions are so few compared to the membership and they cannot cope.

I remember one day we were trying to criticise the organisers for not working. We were receiving complaints at the plants that there was a poor service from the organisers. So we had a meeting and one organiser said to us, look, I am responsible for more than 80 plants myself.

I have made my plan where I targeted at least 50 to be visited in one month. I have

aimed to see the workers before they start work, to see the workers during their lunch, to see the workers when they knock off. I aimed to visit at least four companies a day, or three.

Then he said, I have done that for three days. When you visit the one factory, the workers give you their problems inside the company and you have to go back and write a letter to the company requesting a meeting with them. You go to the second one, you do the same. You find lots of problems, workers demand, you go to the office, write letters to the employers.

He said to us, I have done that for the whole week. It was less than 15 companies for the whole week. The second week I could not visit 15 because I received the response from the first companies that I visited. I set up the meetings. On the first day you find that maybe the meeting is not finished and you have to adjourn it for tomorrow and clash with the other day. You have to postpone that one to another day, postpone that one also. So I could not visit the 50 companies within a month. It is impossible.

The way he was explaining it, it was clear. That alone gives a lot of problems – not having all information or poor service. Once the people do not see their organisers near the factories when they are having problems they will say, we are paying the union, we are getting poor service, why should we go to the meetings? It makes it very difficult for every establishment to know exactly what is happening throughout the union. I would say COSATU is trying but it is not as what it is supposed to be.

***Do you have Indian workers in DUNLOP and have they joined the union?***

Most of them and the coloureds are members of the union. They are about 10% of the black workers. When we have some actions they are participating in the action. I do not know whether they have learned from what has happened before. But when there is nothing that is happening, like having normal general meetings, they do not attend. It is only a few that attend the meetings. ☆

KARL VON HOLDT and WILLIAM MATLALA visited three factories in Natal, two of which were sites of struggle in the 1973 wave of strikes: Alusaf in Northern Natal, Frame Textiles in Pinetown, and Unilever in Durban.

**A**lusaf aluminium smelter at Richards Bay is a huge factory set in the green canefields of Northern Natal. Pot Room A is located under the longest factory roof in the southern hemisphere – 1,3 km long. Inside it is warm and dusty, lit up by lights in the roof and by the flames flickering off the molten aluminium in

at right angles from each other. Up and down the middle of pot rooms A, B and C, workers drive forklifts and tractors, loading new alumina powder and tapping off tons of molten aluminium and driving it to the furnaces in the cast room.

In 1973, hearing about the strike wave further south in Durban, Alusaf workers also downed tools and demanded higher wages.

They were dismissed. The Metal and Allied Workers

Union (MAWU) started organising Alusaf in the mid-70s, but only won informal recognition after a renewed organising drive in 1979. Then,

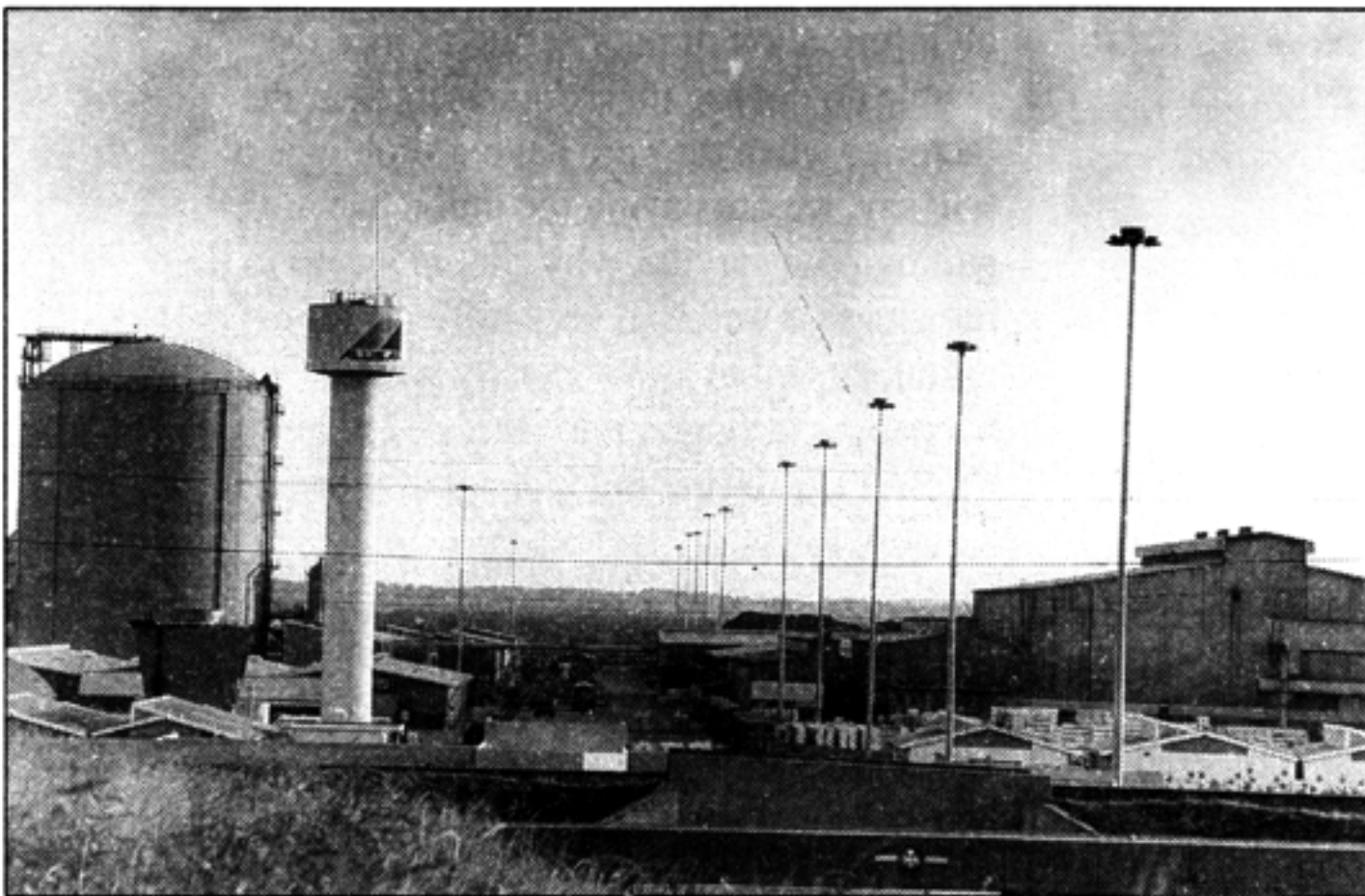
in 1982, workers went out on an ill-prepared strike over wages and pension fund demands. The entire workforce was dismissed. After four weeks they called the strike off and returned to work. A number of key shopstewards were not re-employed.

Now there are four unions in the plant: NUMSA (1 322 members), SA Boilermakers (415), Yster

en Staal (213) and Amalgamated Engineering Union (122).

Fifty percent of the aluminium smelted at Alusaf is exported. The company is so successful its owner, Genmin, is planning to invest R7,2 billion in a second smelter across

## **ALUSAF:** *violence and racism in Northern Natal*

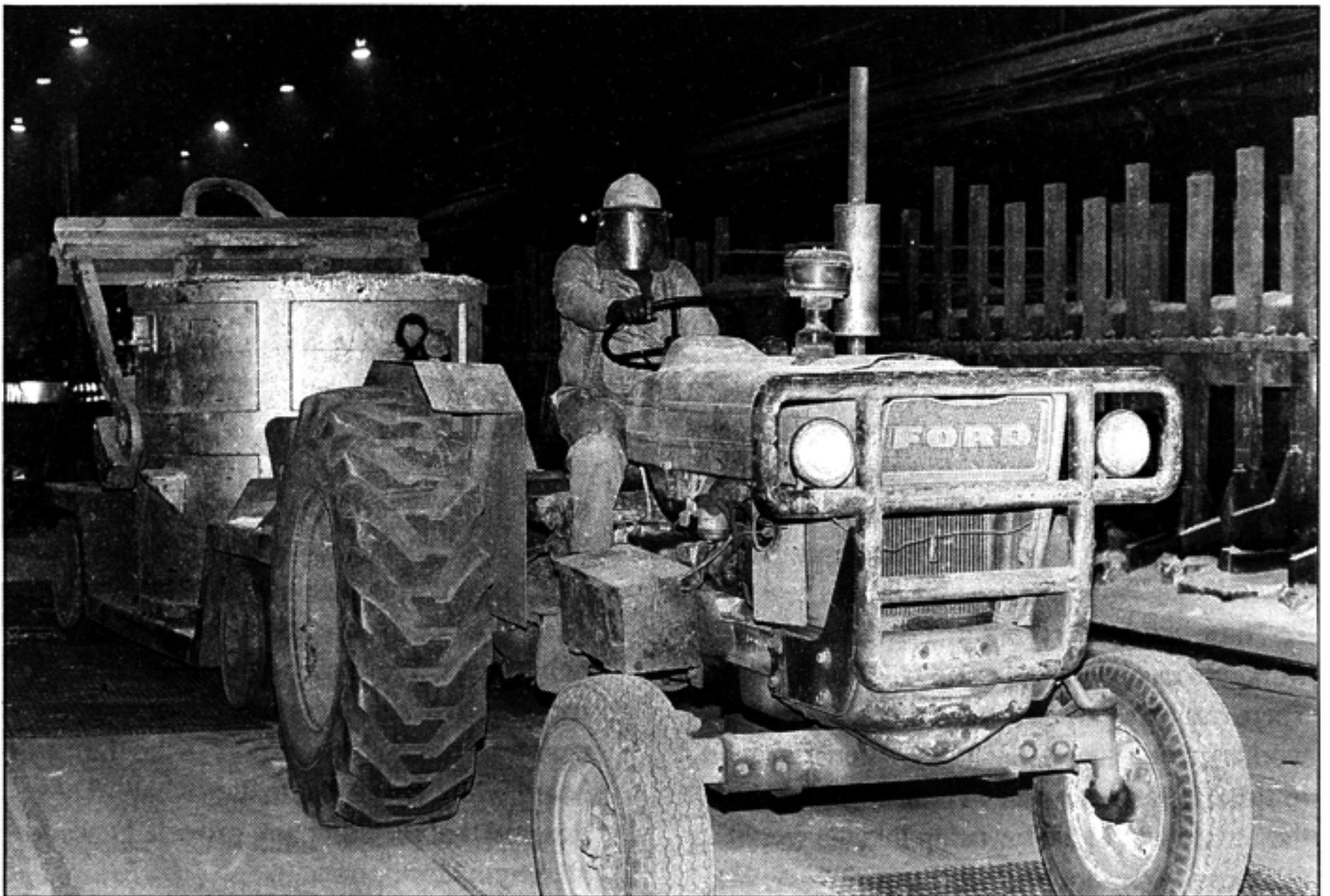
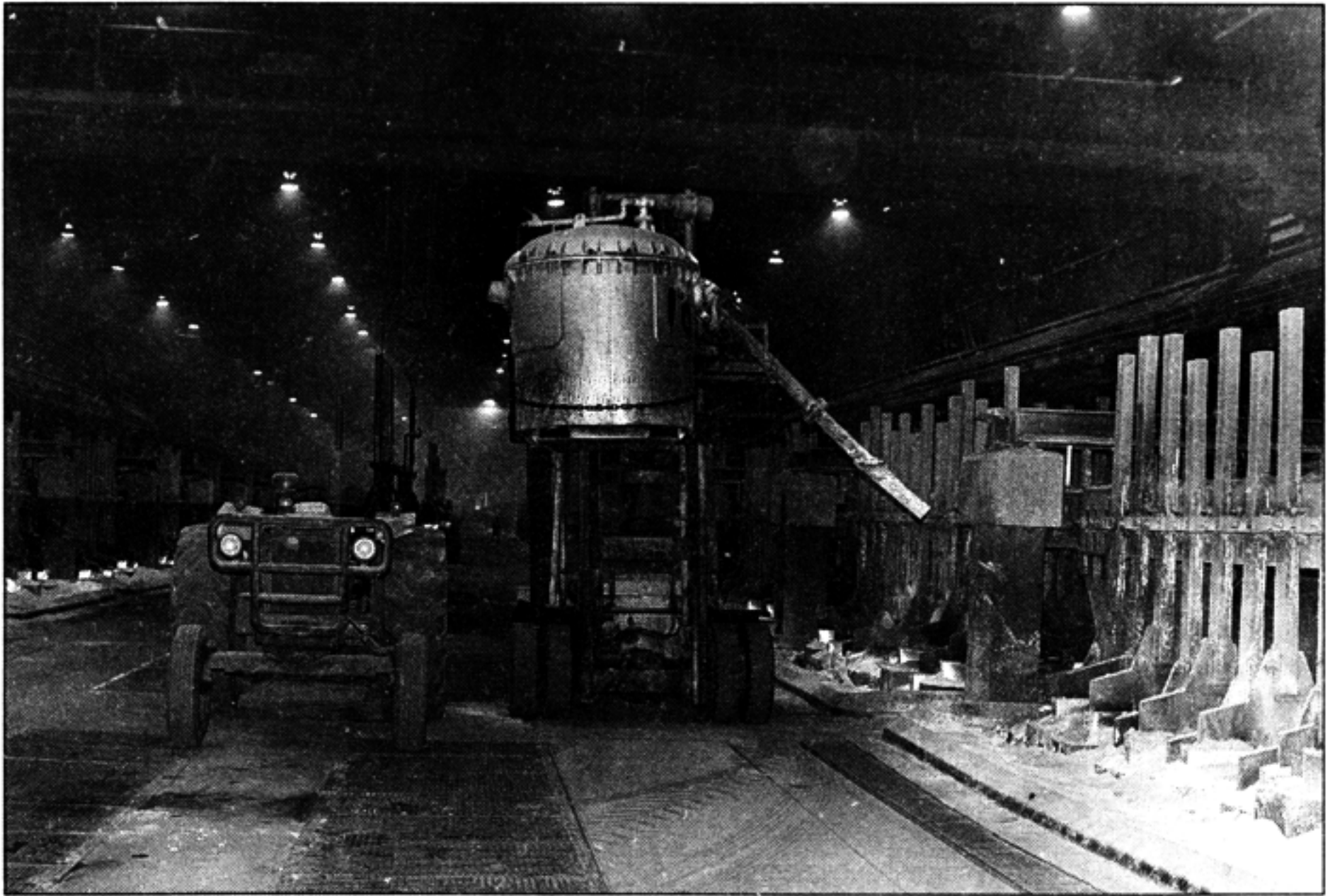


giant pots set below the floor down each side of the building. Enormous quantities of electric current pass through each pot, melting the alumina and reducing it to aluminium. The current is so great its magnetic field inside the factory causes the keys in a bunch to stand out

*ALUSAF: VIOLENCE AND RACISM IN NORTHERN NATAL*

the road. The raw material – alumina powder – that goes into the Alusaf smelting process is all imported. But the people who work there –

2 800 of them – are not. And the huge, hot, dusty factory is charged with high voltage political and racial tensions of South Africa.



### Workers die

Thirty-one Alusaf workers have been killed since 1991 in the low-level war between Inkatha and the COSATU-ANC-SACP alliance in Natal. Workers die, not in the factory, but in the townships when they go home. According to shopstewards, gangs of Inkatha supporters wait for workers to arrive in the townships, and then demand to see their pay-slips. If the pay-slip shows a stop-order deduction for NUMSA, the worker is beaten up or killed. Some 200 workers have resigned from NUMSA and joined the SA Boilermakers Society to escape this danger.

It takes a brave worker to become a shopsteward at Alusaf. The previous chairperson of the shopstewards committee, Jeffrey Vilani, was forced to leave employment and the area after surviving assassination attempts and having his house burnt down twice. Current chairperson Bheki Ntuli's house has also been destroyed, and shopstewards live in constant fear of attack.

These dangers have seriously weakened union organisation. Not only is NUMSA losing members, shopstewards find it difficult to stay in touch with their members or mobilise them around demands. "We no longer have general meetings after work," says Ntuli. "If Alusaf workers arrive home later than others, it is said they have been attending meetings, and they will be attacked."

Shopstewards tried holding regular weekly meetings at lunchtime. Lunchtime is only 30 minutes, but workers were traditionally able to take an extra 15 minutes. "The meetings were successful in mobilising workers, but then management stepped in and applied the 30-minute rule very strictly. Now there is no time to have a meeting." This year shopstewards proposed that the company give workers four hours paid leave per quarter to attend meetings. "This was rejected. It proves management is not sympathetic," says Ntuli.

These conditions make it very difficult for workers to wage struggles around their demands. There has been no strike since 1982, although workers have many grievances. "Workers voted to strike in last year's metal industry strike, but they could not. In the township Inkatha would ask them, 'Why are you not at work?'"

### Racial conflict

Violent conflict with Inkatha is not the only problem Alusaf workers face. Shopstewards say black workers are prevented from using company transport, are given inferior benefits and are not given adequate opportunities for promotion and training. They give the following examples:

- The company provides buses to transport white employees to Empangeni, where they live. Black workers are given a travel allowance for tickets for Umfolozi Transport buses. According to shopstewards, when this was queried, management said the company buses are provided for "staff and those who do not get travel allowances". This excludes black staff since they are given travel allowances like



*Alusaf buses waiting to transport workers back to Empangeni – if they're white*

*Photo: William Matlala*

all other black workers! However, when black employees are late because of a bus strike or other delays, they are penalised. They say that even when a company bus has only three white passengers, it will not stop for black workers. Workers threaten that next time there is a transport strike they will board white buses "no matter what". They demand that the company provide buses for all employees or none.

□ Shopstewards believe the company is deliberately trying to exclude black staff from the benefits white staff members get. Black staff are kept on the provident fund negotiated by the union, whereas white staff are on an Old Mutual pension fund with higher company contributions. Shopstewards say management explains this by saying black staff were members of the union when it negotiated the provident fund. At the same time, say the shopstewards, the company says black staff no longer qualify for holidays on 21 March and 16 June won by the union, as they are no longer shopfloor workers! On the other hand, white scheduled workers (ie shopfloor workers) get the same benefits as white staff.

□ Workers say that racism is rife on the shopfloor. For example, when Alusaf employed its first black engineer, an Indian, and housed him and his family in a company flat in Empangeni, he was tarred and feathered by whites. According to Ntuli, the white men who were arrested for this are still working at Alusaf. When the same Indian engineer disciplined a white artisan and his black assistant for unsafe behaviour, the white artisans in his section said he was biased because he is black, and threatened to strike. According to Ntuli, "We said, You are playing with fire because you are five and we are 21 in this section. We threatened to strike against their strike. I said I would be forced to organise the whole factory against them. So they left it at that."

□ Shopstewards also allege black workers do not have the same training and promotion

opportunities as whites. As an example, they mention the case of Z E Myeni who they say was given the same training for the position of loco driver as whites, but was put on a different grade and job after white workers complained. "Whites don't want to see a black foreman," say the shopstewards.



*Smiles on the shopfloor – but shopstewards say that racism is rife*  
Photo: William Matlala

Although Alusaf has a number of black artisans and apprentices, the shopstewards allege that there is no affirmative action as far as technician training is concerned. They also complain that black apprentices are trained in inferior Kwazulu government institutions, rather than the well-resourced technikons in Durban and Newcastle attended by white apprentices.

Alusaf general manager (personnel) Dr J C van der Walt acknowledges that there is racism among Alusaf's workforce, but states the company has taken many steps to overcome it. He refers to the fact that a third of all supervisory staff are black, that Alusaf was one of the first companies to train black apprentices and that some 770 employees, the majority black, have become home owners through company loans. "We don't like to hammer the issue of black and white," he says.

However, shopstewards feel they are engaged



*Dr JC van der Walt, general manager (personnel)*

*Photo: William Matlala*

in a constant struggle against racism, and that senior management colludes with racism rather than trying to end it. This makes them suspicious of most management initiatives.

### **Conflict over participation**

Management speaks with pride of the company quality circles and the suggestion scheme, which pays out R500 to any worker whose suggestion is implemented. But this is one of the initiatives which seems to have fallen foul of racism.

According to Ntuli, after they were trained how to use quality circles, “black workers made some suggestions for changing the pots to make work safer and easier. The senior foreman and shift controller said they could not accept that because it was the idea of blacks. They said it was going to waste money. Management agreed. They just side with them because they are white. I said this is the right thing to get people creative, to think and suggest. But their attitude means we are blind to think sharply, there was no use to continue. We then preached to our members to reject it.”

The other shopstewards agree. “We don’t know any person who has got suggestion money,” they say. “Only white suggestions get money. We see it as our right to make suggestions, but they are subject to approval and the foremen throws our ideas out.”

The shopstewards argue that the quality circles are intended to undermine the union. For example, “As NUMSA shopstewards we demanded that the shunters should have two-way radios. Management refused. But when the same suggestion - for the same reasons - came from the quality circles, they accepted it. Why?”

The difference over quality circles is linked to broader questions of participation in decision-making in the workplace. Ntuli says, “Workers are being pushed from behind by management forcefully. They do not want to train workers, they see training as a waste. They want to be cops, just to stand behind us.” He says quality circles would be good “if we were allowed to debate our ideas democratically. Management could come back and say, ‘Look, we accept your viewpoint but it is very expensive. Can you think of another one?’ Or come up with an alternative themselves.”

### **Health and safety**

This conflict extends to health and safety. Management speaks about the success of their health and safety programme and about the enthusiastic involvement of workers. They showed a video which includes a sequence of workers singing a song to welcome NOSA (National Occupational Safety Association) inspectors. Van der Walt pointed out Ntuli among the singers: “Workers did this on their own,” he said. “Workers are very proud of health and safety.”

Ntuli rejects this. “We were just told there are some visitors and we should come and sing. We did not even know who they were. After singing, we had to go and management continued meeting with NOSA alone.”

The shopstewards say, of course they comply with regulations – they want to be safe. But they are angry that, as shopstewards, they have no rights to participate in health and safety matters and that management refuses to negotiate a health and safety agreement.

They give the example of Xolani Dlamini, who was killed driving a tractor due to what they allege was management negligence. Shopstewards had no rights to investigate the accident and fear there could have been a



cover-up. They accuse management of using health and safety as a disciplinary issue, and refer to the example of a shopsteward, B S Mthethwa dismissed from the same department where the tractor accident happened simply for keeping a bicycle without rubber pedals.

As senior shopsteward, Bheki Ntuli sits on the company safety committee, but regards this as useless because he is always outvoted by the managers. He argues there should be a safety committee in every department with strong worker representation. According to Ntuli, the company recently logged two million hours without disabling injuries under the NOSA system and, in "recognition of workers' efforts", gave everyone a special ID badge. According to Ntuli, the badges are piling up in his office to be handed back to management. "We reject this kind of unilateral decision-making. We also reject the two million hours – we have had two accidents, but the company put the injured workers on light duties so they were not recorded as disabling."

### Opposite views

According to Van der Walt, management is satisfied with its relationship with the union. He explained the negotiating, grievance and disciplinary procedures. He described the pension and housing benefits. "We have never retrenched," he says. "Now we have a moratorium on retrenchments – it is dangerous, but it creates a sense of security." At least half the employees at Alusaf have been there longer than 11 years. There has been no strike for 11 years.

Another achievement, says Van der Walt, is that Alusaf has reduced the number of grades to seven, with labourers earning 45% of artisans' wages. Alusaf also played an important role "making it possible for MAWU to join the industrial council". Van der Walt was industrial council chairperson at the time.

Ntuli describes the relation between management and workers as "bad". "They are not ready for the new era," he says. He relates with anger how the company refused to provide facilities to help the shopstewards organise shopsteward elections in the company this year. The shopstewards wanted to use the



*Bheki Ntuli, shopsteward chairperson at Alusaf*

*Photo: William Matlala*

elections to educate their members about national political elections, and to prove there would be no intimidation. "Just because we highlighted that, they refused assistance."

He says they are defending cases every day, and even minor cases are made big issues by management. He cites several cases:

- Tito Mthiyane, a very active shopsteward, was fired when he missed work because his house was burnt down. "Management said it was not their problem, you have chosen to be an activist, that is why you were targeted. If you were only a NUMSA member you would not have been targeted."
- Another worker on his way to work was told by Inkatha to get off the bus and toyi-toyi. He told other workers to inform his superior, but he was fired for coming late.
- Shopsteward Bekinhlanhla Mthethwa was dismissed for having an unsafe bicycle, as described above.

Ntuli comments that these incidents make people reluctant to stand for election as shopstewards, for fear of being fired. He says the workers' relationship with management deteriorated after MAWU merged with other unions to form NUMSA in 1987. "We became stronger and they saw us as a threat. They went back to their initial tricks of hating the trade unions." ☆

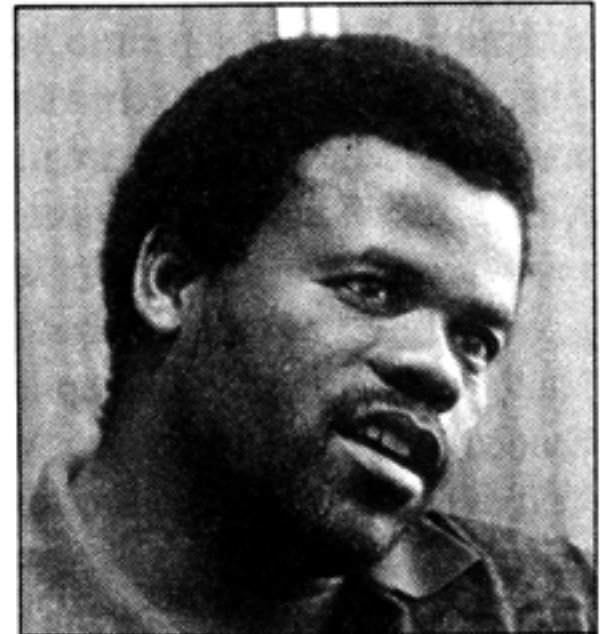
**F**rame Textiles is the largest textile manufacturer in SA, employing some 8 000 workers in the cluster of factories at Frametex, Pinetex and Seltex at New Germany, Pinetown, as well as factories in Durban and Ladysmith. But Frame is not only the largest textile group, it was also the scene of one of the toughest recognition battles in the history of our labour movement.

In 1973 thousands of Frame workers participated in the strike wave (see p20). At that time some 30 000 people worked for Frame. For thirteen years after that they

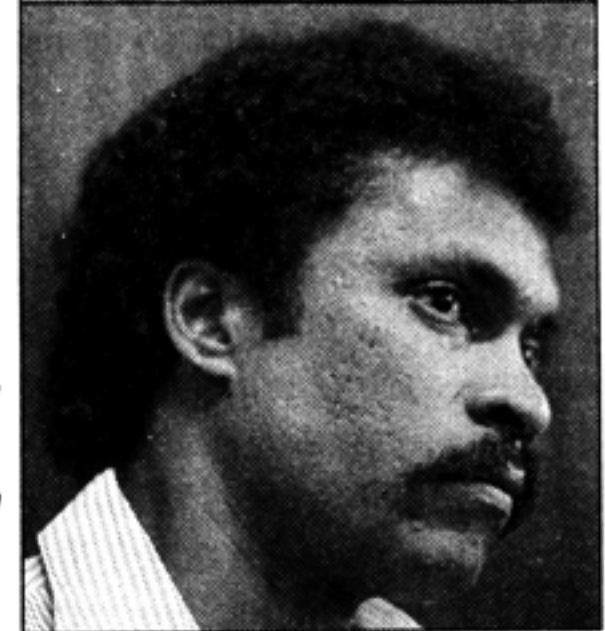
Management also assessed the profitability of various sections, and closed a number of factories. The introduction of new spinning and weaving technology also took its toll.

Now some 8 000 workers work for Frame. Management took us on a tour through the spinning and weaving mills on the Frametex site. We passed banks and banks of blending,

*Amon Ntuli,  
SACTWU  
president and  
senior  
shopsteward  
at Frame  
Photo: William  
Matlala*



*Shopsteward  
Purin  
Jankipershad  
Photo: William  
Matlala*



# Frame: *shopstewards make proposals*

continued to struggle for the recognition of their union, the National Union of Textile Workers (since merged with other unions to form the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union, SACTWU). Finally, after strikes, dismissals and a series of court cases, the union won recognition in 1986.

With recognition came dramatic changes. The company was listed on the stock exchange, conservative senior management was replaced by what union president Amon Ntuli calls “moderates”, and relations improved. New management had to “face facts”, negotiate with the union and improve wages and conditions.

But not all the workers could share in the fruits of the struggle they had all fought together. Whereas Philip Frame’s philosophy had been to employ as many as possible but pay as little as possible, the new management adopted a philosophy of ‘A better future for fewer workers’. There have been several waves of retrenchments to reduce the workforce.

drawing and spinning machines through which the bales of cotton and artificial fibre are spun into yarn. We then went through the weaving mills, where row after row of looms spew out cloth. Figures of workers move up and down tending the machines. The mills are enveloped in unceasing rhythmic sound, like a mechanical sea – this impression is reinforced by the rising and falling motion of the looms, and the cotton dust like white spray through which the workers move.

It is difficult to believe, seeing the cluster of factories, the rows of machines with hundreds of workers tending them, producing kilometres of yarn and piles of cloth, that the company is in “survival mode”. But it is. Over the past two



*Police confront Frame strikers in 1980: one of the many disputes on the long march to improved working conditions and recognition of their union*

*Photo: Courtesy of Historical Papers, Wits University*

years Frame has made no profit. Management is battling with cheap imports, with trying to enter highly competitive international markets, with trying to cut costs.

### **Getting cheaper**

“The only way we can survive is to get cheaper,” says Spinning Business Unit chief executive Dave Duncan. “The big trick is to get the real world onto the shopfloor. Aspirations are out of tune with reality.” Getting cheaper means doing things better, improving technology and training – as well as cutting labour costs and ending the disruption of mass action.

Group human resources manager Quentin Baxter echoes these concerns. He believes the union leadership understands the crisis in the textile industry, but questions whether union

membership has the ability to do so. “The union has a tremendous role to play in changing the industry. Management and the union will have to look at how we become a least-cost producer. Labour costs are a major factor. We have to look at wages. Our concerns centre on unrealistic aspirations.”

### **Restructure management**

SACTWU shopstewards at Frame tend to define the issues differently. According to Amon Ntuli, SACTWU president and senior shopsteward at Frametex, there have been “tremendous achievements and changes in favour of workers” since recognition in 1986. “Our relationship with management on a day-to-day basis is not really an issue. But we do believe the industry must be restructured, and that includes management. From top to

bottom management has been structured by apartheid. We have foremen, managers and directors who don't qualify. We need to restructure in terms of real knowledge and capability, and providing proper training for workers. Then we will achieve better productivity."

Both Ntuli and shopsteward Puran Jankipershad are monthly paid staff members.

Ntuli was a weekly paid worker until recently. The monthly paid bargaining unit was organised in 1989 (see LABOUR BULLETIN Vol 17 No 2). They say because monthly paid staff are closer to management it is easier for them to spot management problems. They feel there are too many managers and many lack ability and motivation. "If there is no motivation at the top there will be no motivation at the bottom," says Jankipershad. Although the workforce has been reduced to a third of its size, the number of managers has increased dramatically, according to Ntuli. "If they close a company they retrench the workers, but they transfer half the managers." Managers get high salaries and company cars. "If they are serious about the crisis they should look at their structures first."

Baxter believes such views are "often due to misperceptions".

He also says it is management's responsibility to manage, but he believes that it is important for management to discuss and explain its structures with the union and all employees. One of the big challenges facing the company, he believes, is to change the management style: "management needs to be educated. With affirmative action an African management style will come in". What does this mean? "We have only the vague outlines of something that can be developed. Most foremen are black and they cannot impose an

authoritarian or instruction type of style. Communication in the mother tongue is also important."

The shopstewards are also concerned about the role of line management, but they believe this is part of a deeper management crisis. "The foremen and supervisors were always made to feel like gods over the shopfloor workers," says Ntuli. "But their authority is

challenged on the shopfloor. The weekly paid workers are stronger than the monthly paid. They see the monthly paid as management's boys. The monthly paid also see themselves like that. At the same time senior management is confused, so line management gets nothing from above and nothing from below." The



Dave Duncan (left) and Quentin Baxter of Frame management

Photo: William Matlala

shopstewards say these conflicts prevent supervisors and foremen from playing the role of a shopfloor leadership – they fear criticism and they fear stoppages.

This view was echoed by one of the managers who took us around the plant. He told us that the political unrest was very disruptive for production. When asked what that meant, he said "For example, when the foremen exert their authority or discipline, they are warned that they will find trouble at home. Their windows will be smashed or something."

### **"Reviving the confidence of line management"**

The fact that the union has organised a majority of monthly paid workers at Frame has brought these issues into the organisation. Shopstewards have made ambitious proposals to tackle the problem. They want the monthly paid workers to attend workshops at the union, shift by shift, where they will learn how to handle their role and their relation with the weekly paid workers. The union wants the

company to provide a paid days leave for workers to attend the workshop to ensure that all are present.

The shopstewards say the workshop would have three aims:

- To revive the confidence of line management. "They have lost confidence because they have been pushed around. They need to gain confidence in themselves and in the company."
- Line management should change their approach as managers. "Their training as supervisors was shaped by apartheid - to suppress fellow workers. This must change. You do not get good production out of people through harshness."
- Although the majority of the monthly paid workers have joined the union, it only communicates with them during negotiations. "We need a day to look at the rights and role of these workers in relation to the higher management and in relation to the weekly paid workers. This can help solve some of the productivity problems." "We need to change the attitude of the

monthly paid workers to the weekly paid workers," says Jankipershad, "as well as their attitude to production. The foremen are the key in getting the message to the weekly paid workers." He claims the union's proposal to run a workshop for monthly paid workers was made more than a year ago, but management has not responded. "I believe management is not ready," he says. Top management knows the problems and they feel threatened."

Baxter raises some similar issues in relation to the company's programme of multiskilling workers. "The implication is that workers gain a better understanding of processes and of workloading, of the number of people needed. They will also learn tolerance for other people's work." However he is much more cautious about the need for changing the role of the supervisor. "Eventually, yes, multiskilling would create the possibility for that," he concludes.

In fact skills and training may be the area where the views of management and shopstewards converge the most – but still with significant differences. Both agree that

### Frame: responding to the textile crisis

Over the past three years Frame Textiles – the largest textile group in SA – has been experiencing the competitive pressure of cheap imports as tariffs have been lifted. "The only way we can survive is to get cheaper," says spinning chief executive Dave Duncan. "We have to reduce costs every day and every week." Frame has made no profit over the past two years.

The company has already undergone "really big changes" – rationalising, closing down under-utilised plants – and is aggressively pursuing the export market. Still, Frame will have to further rationalise in the face of cheap competition from the Pacific Rim countries such as India, Malaysia and Pakistan. "Labour is cheaper – R150 per month. Their technology is different and productivity is higher," says Duncan.

Cutting costs means changing the way

things are done, investing in technology where possible ("we don't have the capital") – and reducing labour costs. According to Frame human resources manager Quentin Baxter, "Labour costs are a major factor. The problem is that worker aspirations are out of touch with the reality of wages around the world."

Frame already exports "a lot" of yarn but does not show profit on this because of cheap prices. The company is "aggressively" pursuing international niche markets in fabric and cloth, but this requires costly marketing infrastructure.

Frame believes there has to be an element of protection for the SA textile industry while companies modernise and restructure so as to become world competitive. A lot will depend on the policies of a future government. "The trick at the moment is to survive. It is a holding action," says Duncan. ♦

developing skills is the key to increasing productivity, but they disagree on whether company training is adequate. Baxter says the company is embarking on a two year programme to ensure that every person has the level of skills required for his or her job. He adds that Frame has the most advanced operative training programme in the country and that it is used by other textile companies. But Ntuli says the training is inadequate. "Four weeks to train a weaver is ridiculous compared to training overseas."

### Worker participation

While both management and shopstewards have concerns about management style, the role of supervisors, and the need for training and skills, these exist within a framework of fundamental disagreement about the degree of worker participation in management decision making. For management the main forum for worker participation appears to be the green areas.

"We have a high level of communication on the shopfloor," says Baxter. "Communication is the key. In some factories the green areas work better, and in others not so well, but we always have that sort of discussion ongoing."

However for Ntuli green areas are completely inadequate. Shopstewards want to see worker participation in decision making much higher up in the company. "Green areas are not the place to reach a good relationship and to communicate. If workers want to raise an issue to management they have no right to do so. But when management wants to raise an issue they call the workers to the green area. The manager decides whether the green area should meet monthly, weekly or daily. Many problems are raised and not addressed."

Weekly paid shopsteward Columbus Mbutho also argues vigorously against the

green areas. "Management uses them to try to undermine the confidence of workers in the union," he says. "But we achieve nothing through the green areas. Management uses them if they want to brief us about production or about 'no work no pay'. Ntuli says the green areas were instituted unilaterally without discussing it with the union. "If they want to deal with problems they should talk through

the union. They should channel it through the shopstewards," he says.

Ntuli believes the problems facing the company will only be resolved if labour can sit with the board of directors. He wants equal participation in making decisions about the company. "There may be a need to take very sore decisions, for example retrenchments or short time. Workers

should be involved in those problems and decisions. Then everyone will realise they need to dedicate their lives to their job and do it properly as it should be done."

It may be that exclusion from company decision-making contributes to the everyday tension and conflict that shopstewards experience on the shopfloor despite the relatively good relation between the union and management at Frame. Weekly paid shopsteward Nosipho Msomi, for example, told us shopstewards have to "fight like mad" over discipline. She says managers often breach the recognition agreement, especially with new shopstewards. "If I am not there as the senior shopsteward, the manager can easily pressurise an ordinary shopsteward."

She tells of one worker who had worked for the company for 20 years. She was dismissed for stealing half a toilet roll. "The manager took no notice of her service or the production she has done in 20 years. He simply dismissed her. She was only taken back after appeal. This means there is no friendship between us and



Weekly-paid shopstewards Nosipho Msomi (left), and Columbus Mbutho

Photo: William Matlala

management." Msomi complains that when the managers act unprocedurally, they do not get a warning whereas shopstewards who do so are given warnings.

### Complex tensions

Together with everything else in SA, Frame is undergoing transition. The bobbins in the spinning mills spin and spin, singing like insects in a forest. The looms crash and crash like a mechanical sea. Workers move up and down, up and down, tending the rows of machines. As night falls the day shift leaves the factory in a flurry of noise and rushes to the taxis. The night shift workers clock in – unlike the real forest or real sea, night never falls here, under the factory lights.

But underlying this apparent order and regularity are complex tensions. The union has a stable collective bargaining relationship with management. Yet on the shopfloor there are conflicts over discipline, over authority and the role of the supervisors and foremen, over 'participation' and communication.

All of this is linked to a fundamental difference over participation and decision-making. Both management and shopstewards agree that the textile industry is facing a crisis, that Frame is in "survival mode". Management knows it needs the support of the union and workers in order to survive and grow. But it sees this support in a narrow way:

- Union involvement in the tripartite forum on restructuring the industry;
- union involvement in getting the "reality" of lower wages and increased productivity onto the shopfloor;
- worker co-operation with managers in solving productivity problems in "green areas";

- generally a higher level of co-operation created by a new "management style" which puts more emphasis on communication and partnership.

The shopstewards argue for much more far-reaching change. The workers' demands for more radical participation are fuelled by the



*The day-shift heads for home, while in the factory, the night-shift workers clock-in, ready to take their places at the machines*

*Photo: William Matlala*

experience of exclusion and oppression under apartheid: "It is all caused by apartheid," says Columbus Mbutho. "Management believes a black man has got black brains."

Shopstewards want disclosure of information about finances, customers, markets and production. They want equal participation in all decision-making about the company. They want to fundamentally re-organise the relation between management and workers.

If that happens, says Ntuli, "everyone will dedicate their lives to the job. If not, management won't get the confidence of the workers at Frame Group."

However, Ntuli believes there is a "no movement" in the direction of equal decision making "only talk". He says this is a chance to stabilise the company, but that top management does not want to confront the issues. "We like Frame and we want to work," he says. "We have no hidden agendas." ☆

**M**any factories seem to be very simple places. Take the Lever Brothers soap plant in Durban. This is three stories high. At the top is a computerised control room which regulates the mixing of chemicals in a system of vats and pipes on the top two levels. The chemicals move downwards through this system, finally producing long strips of soap, which slide down a chute to the ground floor. Here the strips are sliced, shaped into bars, wrapped and packed by a series of machines watched over by operators. Simple.

# Unilever: *testing worker participation*

But it is far more complex than it looks. Management has introduced a series of 'participative management' innovations and is exploring this process, testing what it may mean for relations with the union and the workers. On the other side, too, workers are assessing the new participative forums, testing them to see what they may offer.

Unilever is a UK-based multinational manufacturing foods, detergents and personal care products. There are three Unilever operating companies at Unilever's Maydon Wharf site in Durban – Elida Ponds, Lever Brothers and VDB Foods. There are some 1 000 workers on the site, the majority at Lever Brothers. Their union is the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). Unilever workers did not participate in the 1973 strikes. CWIU won recognition in the late 70s, and a wage strike in 1984 "united workers and developed union consciousness", according to shopstewards.

All of the Unilever companies are

implementing forms of worker participation, in part as a strategy to increase productivity as competitive pressure mounts in the market. This process seems to be most developed at Lever Brothers.

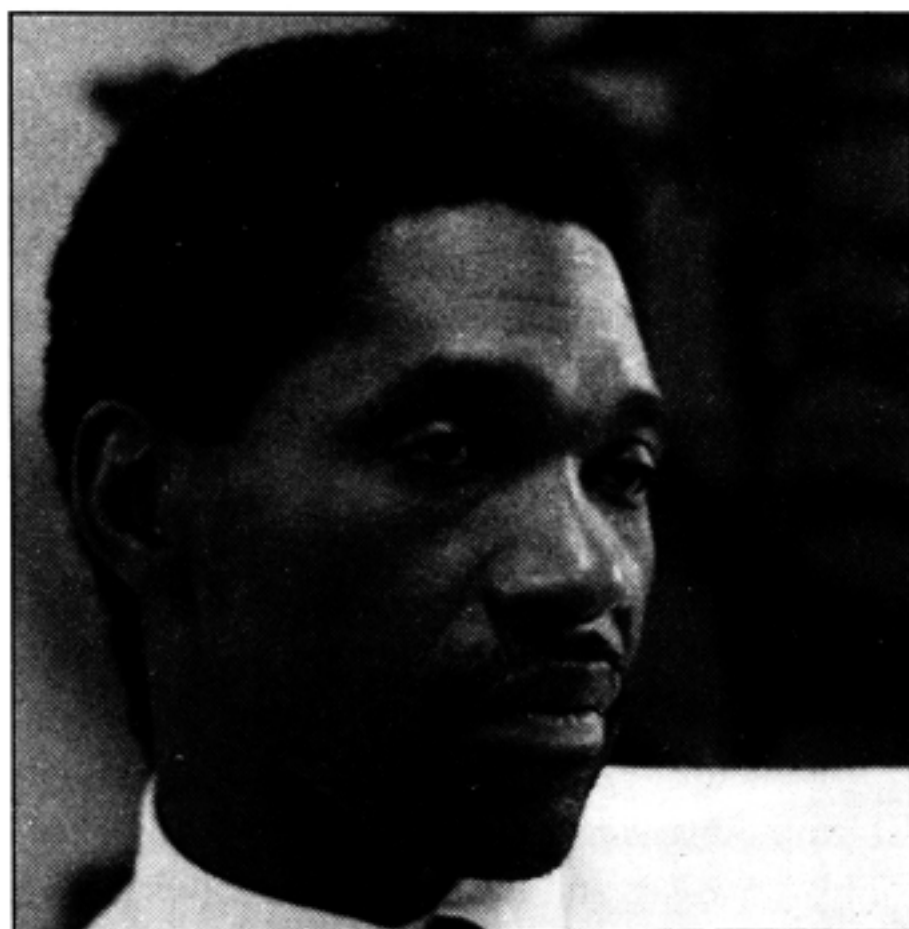
## Participation forums

According to Loyal Ndwandwe, the industrial relations (IR) manager at the Maydon Wharf site, the process of introducing more participative relations started in 1989 with a value-sharing workshop. "We faced the apartheid differences

between us in the company, and asked what sort of company we would like to work for. Out of this came the conceptual framework for later developments."

Shopstewards, says Ndwandwe, were involved and consulted from the beginning. As an example of what the participative process has achieved, he cites the

election of workers to the job evaluation committee. "This is a breakthrough," he says. "At first the union was reluctant to be involved in job evaluation, but we have reached the point where shopstewards facilitated the elections of worker reps to the committee."



*Loyal Ndwandwe: worker participation brings breakthroughs*

*Photo: William Matlala*



Ndwandwe also believes there is a changing relationship between workers and their foremen in the departments. He says worker participation evolves differently in different departments. For example, some departments elect committees representing shifts with shopstewards participating in the committees. These committees meet as frequently as they decide, to resolve a broad range of issues. "Other departments regularly take time off where the whole department brainstorms on issues pertinent to the life of that department. These sessions are referred to as 'team building' sessions."

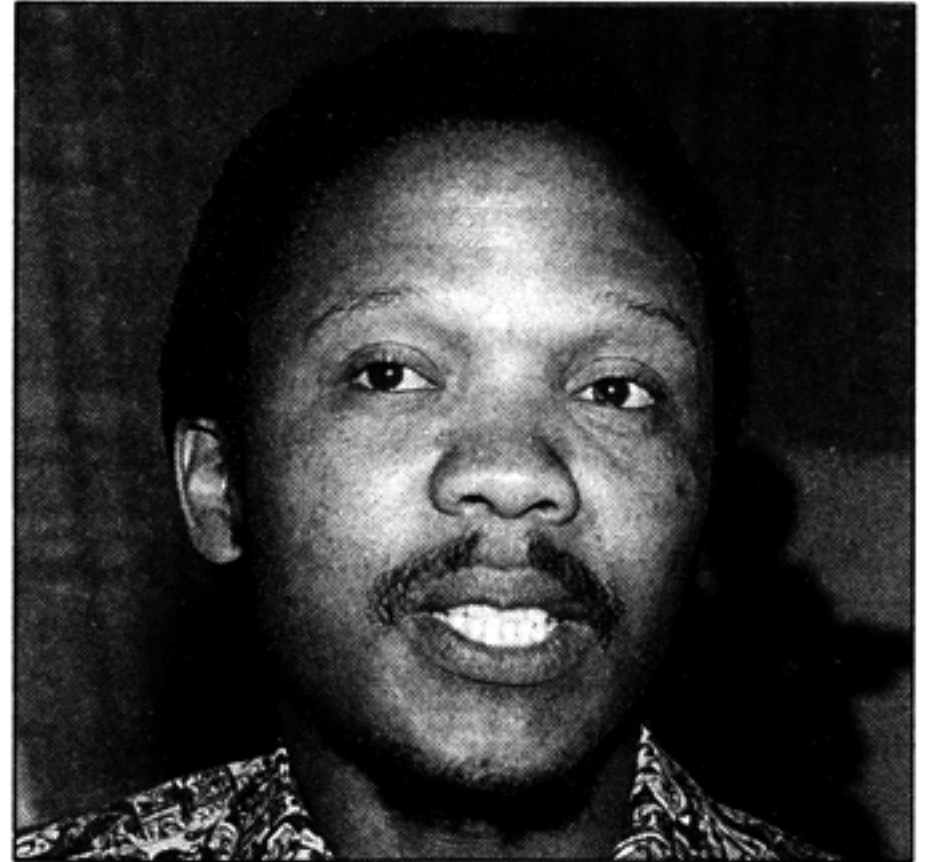
At these meetings, workers discuss production and other issues: "The committees or teams do not only discuss production issues, targets etc. Committees have been involved in deciding whether someone should be promoted to foreman, or who should fill certain positions. They can deal with anything affecting the life of the people – they can take whatever shape people want." Some issues are resolved in the department, others are sent to the union/management negotiations forum for the site.

"At department level, shopstewards are increasingly playing a different role – they directly advise line management on a range of issues. They are available for consultation." According to Ndwandwe, this means issues can be resolved before they have to be referred to procedures. "The challenge is to transfer this co-operative relationship to the formal structure of collective bargaining."

What happens if a foreman – most of whom are white – rejects the views of a shopsteward, committees or team? "They can confront the foreman," says Ndwandwe, "and explain he cannot simply choose when to accept the views of the workers." He says there have been conflicts, but in the end the foreman will find the only way is to work with the other workers.

### Workers testing participation

Doctor Ncobela, secretary of the shopstewards committee at the Maydon Wharf site, and a worker at Elida Ponds, says workers are still sceptical about the participative process. "At general meetings, workers did not have a uniform position on rejecting the scheme or



*Doctor Ncobela: workers are still sceptical ... but are testing the forums to see what gains can be made*

*Photo: William Matlala*

amending it. We decided to use developments at Lever Brothers as a way of testing it."

One reason workers were sceptical, says Ncobela, was that management seemed to be avoiding workers' demands. He recalls that union demands for education and training were discussed in negotiations in November 1991, and it was agreed this matter should be referred to a national bargaining forum for Unilever as a whole when one was established. "We believe the participation schemes could be a counter strategy in response to our demands. We had been making those demands for a long time. Then all of a sudden they introduced these schemes, claiming that it covered our demands. Why so urgent? Why so fast?" Ncobela says the participative project was never negotiated with shopstewards or the union.

Still, says Ncobela, workers and the shopstewards as their leaders are testing the forums to see what gains can be made. As an example, he too refers to the election of workers to the company job evaluation committee – but he sees this as a union victory. A problem with job evaluation was raised in the participation forum in a particular department, he says. The shopsteward in that department took the issue to a shopsteward caucus. Since all departments experience

similar problems, shopstewards decided to raise this at a general meeting.

The general meeting resolved to demand equal representation for workers and management on the job evaluation committee. "We had long negotiations last year before management conceded. They also agreed to provide training for the worker representatives on the committee."

Workers also successfully used the participative forums to have matric-level science and maths classes introduced at Lever Brothers, according to Ncobela. "Management is always talking about the need for workers to have science and maths. We discussed this at a general meeting and decided to raise it in these forums. As a result, we now have an organisation called Promat running classes at the company."

### What is the role of the union?

Ndwanwe emphasises the informality of developing a new relationship between workers and management. He distinguishes between formal IR, and informal relations. Formal IR is the sphere of negotiations between union structures and management, and of following agreed procedures. The sphere of informal relations is where the participative forums happen.

Ndwanwe believes the formal IR relations and the informal relations influence each other. "In practice, we have seen co-operation without asking the union to co-operate. You cannot strategise this from the IR structures. The industrial relations climate is not created by the shopstewards and the IR manager – it is created by those who produce commodities." Hence the focus on department-level forums.

This is exactly what the shopstewards criticise. Ndwanwe says the shopstewards have been "involved". Ncobela says the participative process has never been negotiated. Ndwanwe says the process evolves differently in each department. Ncobela says it is "imposed" by management, and that the success of each forum depends on the attitude of that particular manager.

The result, says Ncobela, is that workers may be confused and divided as things develop differently in different departments – and in

different companies on the same site.

Individual workers are not sure whether they have the right *not* to participate – "they think it is part of the conditions of employment and that they are obliged to participate."

Ncobela acknowledges that most of these problems occur at the other companies, rather than at Lever Brothers. But he does fear the participative forums are designed to undermine their union. "Management says the forums are for communication. We say they should use the union and the shopstewards for any communication they want."

Ndwanwe responds by stressing the importance of a strong and credible union presence. "We have instructed the foremen never to act in such a way as to undermine the authority of the union structure on site." He says there is a role for unions in dealing with production issues, but he emphasises the role of the "internal leaders" of the unions, ie the shopstewards. "We regard them as partners in steering our ship towards a productive destination". He is cautious about the role of trade union structures outside the factory: "This process is about company direction, and it involves many who the union does not represent – as well as customers, suppliers, etc." However, "maybe in future this relationship could be formalised through direct talks with the union on some issues," he says.

The shopstewards want more far-reaching participation than provided for by the departmental forums. "The company talks about productivity, but does not open its books for us to have audited. We need to know what the company is doing for the country or investing in the community, then we can talk about productivity. They want us to get involved in production and productivity but not profits or profit sharing. We want to be involved in both."

Other concrete demands the shopstewards believe the company is avoiding are:

- Support in establishing an industrial council in the chemical industry. Unilever did not attend a meeting convened by CWIU to discuss this issue.
- The demand for a centralised forum for all Unilever companies.

□ The demand for a uniform, company-wide training policy and programme negotiated with the union. At Elida Ponds, claims Ncobela, "The young training officer is training people how to do jobs they have already been doing for ten years."

The shopstewards fear that worker participation schemes will lead to contracting out and retrenchments. "We are not sure whether the company is in crisis or not – we have not seen the books," they say. "We believe that company problems can be discussed and sorted out through centralised bargaining. Then, if need be, we can approach the government."

Ndwandwe feels it is positive that workers are demanding an increasing amount of information and participation in decision-making. "I see us responding once the workplace community is ready." The aim, he says, is not to control developments, but rather encourage them to develop spontaneously.

According to Ndwandwe, there is a debate within Lever Brothers about the extent to which workers should participate in decision-making. The mutual value-sharing workshop expressed a joint commitment to "creating and sharing" wealth. "The question is, how do we do this?"

## Challenges

Of the companies we visited in Natal, Unilever – and more particularly Lever Brothers – clearly has the most advanced worker participation programme. It is too early to evaluate fully, but management initiatives do seem to offer genuine opportunities for developing more co-operative relations on the shopfloor and for empowering workers.

However, the situation does pose complex and subtle challenges for the union. There seems to be a mixed attitude towards the union. Managers are trying to establish direct relations with the workers, rather than relating through the union structures, but they are careful to avoid antagonising the union in the process. The emphasis on department-level interaction, on the spontaneous evolution of the forums rather than a negotiated framework, and on the "internal leaders" of the union rather than

external union structures, could develop a momentum that undermines the basic union structures – a collective of all workers at the company with the shopstewards as their mandated representatives, supported by union officials and linkages with workers at other Unilever sites and other chemical companies.

The shopstewards have responded by using union structures – the shopsteward caucus, the general meeting of all workers, the formal negotiating forum – as a base for engaging with the participative forums, to interact with them and test them. At times, an issue emerging in a participative forum is then raised in negotiations (for example, the job evaluation committee). At other times, a general issue is raised through the participative forums (for example, maths and science classes). This strategy serves as a counter to the union-undermining dynamic outlined above. Without this kind of active intervention by the shopstewards and their base, the management initiative would probably lead to *participation* combined with *disempowerment* and *fragmentation*.

The challenge for the shopstewards and their union, once they have evaluated the participation forums, will be to develop their own vision of how participation should function and what it could accomplish, and then take the initiative in negotiating this with management. Such an experiment would have great value for the labour movement as a whole. They will also have to work out how to harness their involvement in the participative forums to their (as yet vaguely formulated) project for much more far-reaching participation: a national Unilever bargaining forum where company policy, open books, profit-sharing, training, and a framework for shopfloor participation can be negotiated.

For the company, the challenge will be whether to accept the implications of participation and move towards substantial partnership with the workers and their union – or to draw the limits at 'management prerogative'. If they do the latter, they are likely to find workers remain sceptical – and refuse to commit themselves to the participation forums or the goal of improving productivity. ☆

KARL VON HOLDT reflects on the LABOUR BULLETIN visit to Natal, on the achievements won by workers since 1973, and on the battles still to be fought.

# **The challenge** *of participation*



Formal rights have been established at most workplaces in SA industry. The relation between workers and managers is no longer arbitrary, but is governed by rules and procedures. In other words, there is a 'rule of law' on the shopfloor and a collective bargaining relationship between trade unions and employers.

[Of course, many workplaces are very weakly organised, and workers are unable to take advantage of their rights.]

For example, two key participants in the 1973 strikes, Coronation and Durban Municipality, are still weakly organised. (The factories we visited are among the best organised.)

While in many workplaces there is a relatively stable relationship between union and management, in others the substance of trade union rights is constantly under management attack. There is a sharp conflict over discipline, racism, management prerogative and authority. The "rule of law" is not a given, but has to be fought for every day. Even in those workplaces where there is a relatively stable relationship, discipline is an area of conflict. The role of line management seems to be highly contested.

These conflicts may be traced to a much greater conflict over democracy and authority in the workplace. [Workers have responded to their experience of exclusion and oppression under apartheid with a vision of substantial participation and democracy as an alternative.] They see the workplace regime as still very much shaped by apartheid. Management is authoritarian, real decision-making lies in the hands of white managers, and workers only have access to information management believes they should have. Even when consultation or 'worker participation' is introduced, it is usually done in a paternalistic and limited way. The result is that workers do not *consent* to the workplace regime.

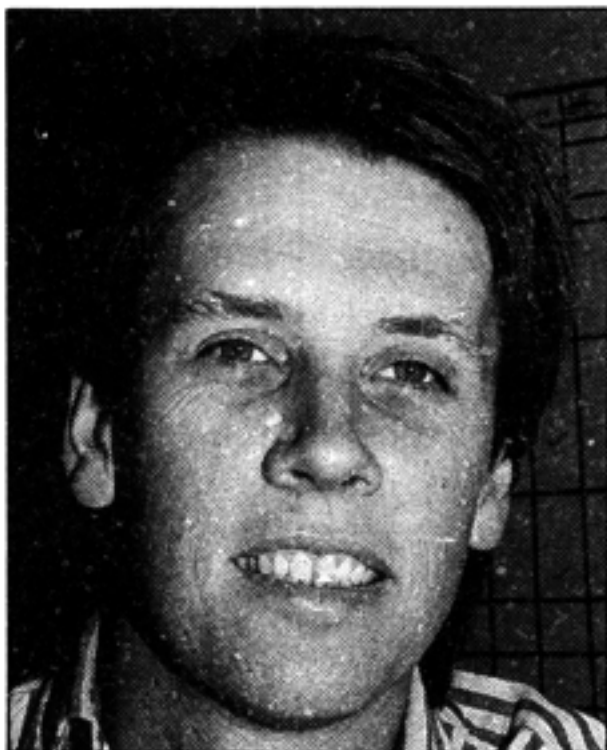
Many employers are introducing 'worker participation' schemes such as quality circles, green areas and team briefing in an attempt to enlist worker co-operation and win consent. A recent survey found that 19% of employers surveyed in the metal industry have 'participative management schemes' (see p15). In our visit to Natal only one of the four companies we targeted, Dunlop, had no such schemes. In companies such as Alusaf or

Frame these schemes are of varying, but marginal significance, whereas for a handful of companies such as Unilever they are a central element in management's IR strategy. In all of the companies we visited, [shopstewards were suspicious or sceptical of these schemes, seeing them as dominated by management and designed to undermine the union.]

[Most managements seem to regard these schemes as a way of establishing direct communication with workers and bypassing the union.] Most managers probably believe quite simply that it is proper to exclude unions from production issues. Others have a more far-reaching agenda: in a recent interview in FINANCE WEEK on employee participation, Carlton Paper MD Keith Partridge said, "someday a company union, or no union at all, may happen."

Most of these schemes have limited prospect for winning workers' consent or co-operation because of the way they are implemented, but the more sophisticated ones may well win the support of workers and undermine the relation between the union and its members. Even where the 'participatory' schemes are less successful they may divide or confuse workers, and weaken the union.

Generally speaking, shopstewards do not have a clear strategy for engaging with or countering 'worker participation' schemes although this is emerging at Unilever. It is easy to reject such schemes when they are paralysed



by racism or paternalism, as at Alusaf. It is more difficult when there is a degree of real consultation. The confusion is evident when shopstewards complain on the one hand that only company problems are discussed, not worker grievances, and on the other hand, when workers' grievances are discussed, that it is divisive.

The one really powerful alternative is that proposed by the shopstewards at Frame – a proposal that they are probably only in a position to make because they have organised the monthly paid workers, including the foremen. Rather than 'participation' being diverted into special places (green areas) or forums (quality circles), they argue for a fundamental re-organisation of relations between line management and workers on the shopfloor. This means participation could be part of the way work is actually done.

The worker participation forums adopted by Unilever seem to have a similar potential. To the extent that it does lead to changing relations on the shopfloor it has similarities to the proposals of the Frame shopstewards, or to the idea of 'work teams' currently being discussed in NUMSA. But both of these focus on negotiated and structured re-organisation of work, in contrast to Unilever's informal process. However, it is not clear how much 'empowerment' is on offer here. How far can management go in giving workers power to determine how things are done in the workplace, in the absence of workers as an organised collective driving the process forward? What is exciting about Unilever is that workers are testing the participation forum in a strategic manner. This opens the possibility, precisely, that workers as an organised collective may be able to use the forums as a way of drawing forward their struggle for real control of the shopfloor.

In general, the response of shopstewards to 'participation' is to argue that they want to participate at a much higher level, where the real decisions are made. There was a strong view among shopstewards at all the companies that we visited that the workplace should be democratised, that workers should have equal

*continued on page 52*

## Twenty years later –

**"We have won the  
dignity of the  
worker as a worker.  
We can challenge  
unfavourable  
decisions,"  
– Unilever  
shopstewards.**

**A**fter criticising management for not treating workers as equals, Frame shopsteward Columbus Mbutho added, "Let us be fair – it is better than before. Things are changing bit by bit. Now we sit down and discuss with management – there is a *big* difference from before." He lists some of the gains won through union struggle and negotiation: wage negotiations, three months maternity leave, a clear grading system and the end of favouritism.

Workers at COSATU's Durban local endorsed these views: "We have won recognition and now most things are negotiated. We have won protection from unfair labour practices. We have won retrenchment packages – before we were dismissed with nothing. We are able to confront the government on any issue – even Derek Keys has to listen to COSATU."

Combating racism was a key issue for many workers. The Unilever shopstewards say, "Whites were very superior. In those days any white man could give you instructions. This meant you had to be in three different places at

## there is a big difference from before."

the same time and you could be dismissed for failing. Now they have to follow the correct channels."

The Alusaf workers have also made gains in the struggle for equal treatment with white workers. They have won group life cover, a disability scheme, and a provident fund, all of which were previously available only for white workers. Bheki Ntuli laughs when he recalls that management supported the argument for excluding black workers from group life cover by arguing that "we blacks use to apply for death by going with sticks when there is a wedding feast. They said this custom means that you can

easily die there, so you have gone to your death, death has not just come by chance." The shopsteward response was that "so called white persons are also risking their lives by going to the sea, sky diving and so on. So do not tell us that we are risking."

In the grind of day to day struggle it is easy to forget how great these achievements are and how they were won through courage, hard work, blood and solidarity. If many managers are now talking about partnership with unions and participation of workers, it is because the unions fought hard and bitter struggles to establish themselves. ♦



Workers at the COSATU Local in Durban: "We have won recognition and now most things are negotiated"

Photo: William Matlala

from page 50

decision-making powers with management or directors, and that management should be transparent. But what would this mean in practice? What is the relationship between this level of decision-making and worker participation on the shopfloor? There are a number of different possibilities: co-determination councils, worker delegates on the board of directors, employee-share ownership schemes (ESOPS), work teams, etc. Each of these possibilities has potential benefits and potential

pitfalls, but neither shopstewards nor unions have debated this and developed a clear set of demands.

The management culture, structure and practice which developed under apartheid has produced a very serious productivity, skill and efficiency crisis in SA. There is a high level of alienation and resistance on the shopfloor. Successful development in SA – whether this focuses on international competitiveness or on expanding the internal market – will depend on overcoming these problems. This will require the radical restructuring of management and of management-worker relations. As a central part of such reforms, racism, discrimination and affirmative action will have to be addressed.

### What could be done?

The trade union movement needs to develop clear policies on 'co-determination' issues, on 'participative management' schemes, and on affirmative action, and formulate strategies for achieving them.

- The trade union movement should engage in an urgent debate about the various options for increasing workers' participation in company decision-making. Most of these options would require a legislative framework and support, particularly as most employers would not accept them



*Workers aspire to real democracy in the workplace: can they crack management resistance?*

*Photo: William Matlala*

voluntarily. For example, the powers and rights of co-determination councils would have to be established, ESOPS could be supported by tax provisions, company law might have to be changed and so on. The labour movement needs to formulate a comprehensive programme for radical workplace reform and then campaign for this on the shopfloor, in the NEF and the NMC, as well as lobby the ANC for support.

- As part of this programme the trade unions need to develop a strategic response to management's 'worker participation' schemes. If they are ignored they will tend to weaken the unions. Unions need to find ways to use them to increase workers' power and influence in the workplace.
- The unions could formulate a national framework of demands for affirmative action in the workplace, and then campaign for these to be implemented. Demands could include a code of conduct, joint management-worker forums to tackle racism and affirmative action, and legislation to facilitate and provide resources for such a programme.

Unless the labour movement takes up these challenges, the aspirations of shopstewards and workers will wither away, and management schemes will prevail. ☆



# Lean production or mean production?

## *Japanese auto plants in the US*

Many employers argue that new Japanese management techniques make trade unions redundant. However a recent survey at Mazda in the US shows how wrong this view is. DENIS MACSHANE\* reports.

**A** fascinating survey carried out among 2 400 workers in a Mazda assembly plant in Detroit, Michigan suggests that so-called lean production management techniques rely as much on managerial authority, relentlessly hard work, and dividing workers against each other as it does on new participatory harnessing of workers' intelligence and skills.

One of the main objects of the evangelists of lean production is to argue that trade unions are outdated obstacles to modern human resources management based on the company's relationship with the individual worker. Instead, suggests this unique survey, unions are essential to help implement and manage lean production techniques to the joint benefit of workers and the employer.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) union survey was carried out, with the help of Wayne State University, among workers at Mazda's plant in Flat Rock in Michigan. Mazda is one

of the leading Japanese assembly plants in the United States. It began operations in 1987 and produces 300 000 cars annually.

Unlike Nissan and Toyota, which sited their main American plants in the non-unionised states of Tennessee and Kentucky in a bid to avoid union recognition, Mazda signed a recognition deal with the UAW in unionised Michigan. Many of the workers recruited had previous car assembly experience in the Detroit factories of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. But the UAW agreed Mazda managers would operate according to their lean production philosophy of human resource management.

Until now, most criticisms of the internal pressures caused by 'lean production' techniques have been anecdotal with little scientific backing. The Mazda survey, however, raises serious questions about the long-term viability of 'lean production' unless it is adapted to take into account normal human

\* Denis MacShane works for the International Metalworkers Federation, the Geneva-based ITS for the world's automobile and metal industry unions.



*Auto plant in SA: workers need union defence against lean production*

*Photo: Shariff*

needs at work.

The most famous advocates of lean production are three academics who wrote a book published in 1990 titled *THE MACHINE THAT CHANGED THE WORLD*. The book was widely quoted by business newspapers in many countries to support the view that lean production meant a positive new deal for autoworkers.

According to the book's authors, auto companies now provided workers with "the skills they need to control their environment" which would do away with the "mind-numbing stress" of old-fashioned mass production. Workers in lean production assembly plants would "think actively, indeed proactively" and help make their work "humanly fulfilling".

None of these researchers, of course, had ever worked on an auto assembly line, nor taken part in union negotiating or representation, and the evidence from the Mazda survey shows how wrong they were.

### **New deal or mean deal?**

One of the most significant replies from the Mazda workers showed that 73% of 2 186 questioned declared that with lean production workloads: "I will likely be injured or worn out before I retire."

As part of Mazda's lean production techniques, the Michigan workers were given a Programmed Work Sheet (PWS) which described in detail their job. But far from the changes included in the PWS system leading to increasing freedom, workers found they involved more control.

Some 67% of those surveyed found that their job had become worse.

To help introduce workers to lean production techniques, Mazda promised increased job training, but 43% of the workforce found the training to be "poor" while 46% considered the training to be only "fair".

Another claim for lean production is the team leader system whereby a worker is

chosen to act as a monitor and extra helper to a group of workers. The team leaders form an intermediary stratum between supervisors and workers, but are paid hourly and identified as workers, not as junior foremen.

According to the Mazda survey, most workers considered the team leaders as representatives of management, not as part of the workplace team. Another 84% of those surveyed wanted a different process of selecting – or electing – the team leader so that s/he was closer to the work team s/he leads.

Finally, the advocates of lean production believe it will reduce the desire or need of workers to go on strike. In the UAW survey, however, 91% of the workers who had experienced lean production believed workers had to retain the right to strike on health and safety standard issues.

Armed with the results of the survey the UAW negotiated a new contract at Mazda in Flat Rock which introduced more flexibility and made team leaders subject to election and recall by their colleagues. It was part of a process of humanising lean production methods by proactive trade union intervention.

In 1992, the Japanese Federation of Auto Workers Unions published a stinging critical analysis of Japanese car companies and their exploitation of Japanese car workers. So in the heart of lean production – Japan – the criticisms are mounting even as West European and American researchers proclaim that a new dawn of lean production has arrived to liberate the car worker from previous oppressions.

The auto companies themselves do not believe this nonsense – which is why they continue to seek to impose lean production on the basis of non-union operations. In the United States, Japanese multinationals such as Nissan and Toyota have spent millions of dollars to keep the UAW out of assembly plants. In Britain, Honda has begun operations in Europe's first non-unionised auto plant in Swindon. In France, the main European advocates of lean production, Renault and Peugeot, are fanatically

anti-union, and French car workers are the least unionised in Europe.

Certainly, the concept of lean production is a valuable one in defining new methods of car manufacturing which require far fewer workers.

But the voice from the shopfloor, as expressed by the Mazda workers in Michigan, is that lean production still entails hard, health-breaking work. Moreover, this work is carried out under authoritarian control. Trade unions need to be there to represent workers' needs and grievances and ensure that lean production does not become mean production – no different, in terms of stress and strain on the worker, from previous systems of car assembly labour.

### **Strike against lean production**

Meanwhile in Canada, the first-ever strike has broken out at a Japanese transplant car factory in North America. Suzuki, in a joint venture with General Motors (GM), assembles Suzuki Swifts at a plant in Ingersoll, Ontario. As part of lean production techniques, workers were banned from reading newspapers or listening to the radio while taking a break.

They are also angry about management exploitation of a non-traditional (by North American standards) agreement with company and union which is designed “to avoid labour-management confrontations, reduce job classification, and give managers more flexibility in reassigning workers.”

Ron Pellerin, the Canadian Auto Workers official responsible for the plant said: “We’re going to have to go back and spell out the rules in a collective agreement. No more of this trust and co-operation business.”

Suzuki workers blame GM managers' style of interpreting Suzuki's managerial philosophy rather than the Japanese company itself. But the strike, along with the Mazda survey, suggests that Japanese-style 'lean production' is neither fault-free, nor does it eliminate worker-management tensions. These still require a trade union presence to resolve them before they explode. ☆



## INTERVIEW

JOHANN DU PLESSIS, president of FEDSAL and DANNHAUSER VAN DER MERWE, general secretary of the organisation speak to Karl von Holdt and Snuki Zikalala.

# FEDSAL:

## *the moderate voice of labour*

### ***Could you give us a picture of FEDSAL?***

FEDSAL has 270 000 members in 17 unions. We are seen to be a white-collar federation only, but in fact we represent thousands of blue-collar members as well. It is people coming together with the same ideology, feeling comfortable together.

FEDSAL was dormant for quite a long time and it was only in 1985 that FEDSAL was resuscitated. From then it grew dramatically until now. Our members are 70% white and about 30% black. That is not because of policy, but because of the composition of its affiliates. History is also a factor. Unions were forced to be segregated and quite a few of our unions come from the olden days – 70 or 80 years ago.

FEDSAL tries to be the moderate voice of labour. People did not feel comfortable with the militancy of COSATU although we understand the reasons for it. People wanted a moderate house. And very important, we are apolitical which ensures our total independence in thought and action.

We are receiving quite a few enquiries from

unions interested in joining FEDSAL. Several organisations have just joined (see table on p63) and others are making enquiries.

The federation is mostly white-collar but about 20% of our members are blue-collar workers.

### ***How do you define white-collar workers?***

White-collar workers are people in administration, sales and similar positions. In many cases we are representative of members in relatively senior positions, for example sales managers and bank managers.

### ***Where do you see FEDSAL going in the changing South Africa and the new South Africa?***

There could in future be a realignment within the labour movement. As the need for political participation diminishes FEDSAL could well act as a facilitator towards achieving greater co-operations amongst the major labour role players. We already co-operate within forums such as the NMC and NEF.

**Do FEDSAL affiliates have black organisers?**

Yes we do. Sometimes it is very interesting - for example in the banking sector an assistant manager may call us for help. When the organiser arrives he is black person. We do have them and they service everyone. Where black organisers do help is with blue-collar workers who do not speak English or Afrikaans and feel more confident with their own language.

**COSATU is now proposing the idea of a reconstruction accord endorsed by itself, the ANC, community organisations etc. This will ensure the ANC develops social and economic policies that meet labour's needs - job creation, houses, training. Would FEDSAL as a labour organisation be interested in participating in the reconstruction accord?**

No, because of the involvement of a political grouping - assuming the ANC has not yet registered as a political party! Whilst the politicians are at the table we would not feel comfortable participating.

**One could foresee all labour organisations discussing and adopting a common position, and taking it to the government of the day?**

I do not see why that is not possible in the future. We may be forced to come closer together. We differ at this stage in our policies and ideologies.

**In a nutshell, what are the major areas of agreements and differences between FEDSAL and COSATU?**

The main differences are COSATU's participation in politics; COSATU's declared policy of one industry one union, and one country one federation; and economic policy. Our major areas of agreement are our joint concern about trade union and worker rights in a new South Africa; labour issues affecting workers across the spectrum; consumer issues such as VAT; the eradication of corruption in

the public service, and a government which is clear, transparent and accountable to the people; and economic growth and job creation.

**What is FEDSAL's relation with the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITU) and the Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU)? They are also a moderate voice of labour.**

Our relations with FITU are cordial, and tentative steps have been taken to co-operate on issues of mutual interests. For example, we are together in the NMC.

Our relations with the Confederation of Labour and the CMBU can at best be described as non-existent on a formal level. We made approached to bring the CMBU and FEDSAL together, but unfortunately did not succeed.

**You say FEDSAL is in the middle. Two things can happen - the middle can become smaller as members leave to the left and the right, or the middle can grow. What is the future of FEDSAL? Will it remain a predominantly white, white-collar federation?**

Our objective is for FEDSAL to grow to its maximum potential. FEDSAL's racial composition will always be determined by the composition of its member unions. As we are a non racial organisation open to both white-collar and blue-collar workers the questions becomes irrelevant. Race plays no role in FEDSAL and for that reason we are not in the least concerned about the racial composition of our membership. What is of great importance is to represent like-minded people. You can't be everything to everybody. TUCSA tried to do that and went under.

**Is there any likelihood of a merger with COSATU?**

I do not foresee that.

**What does FEDSAL see as major issues at the NMC?**

The process of commenting on labour legislation and labour issues on an on-going



Johann du Plessis

Photo: William Matlala

basis. Secondly, the redrafting of the Labour Relations Act. Thirdly, establishing a union scope of application of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, Workmen's Compensation Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. We want to see the NMC develop into the most important and respected labour forum in the country. It has still got a long way to go – the new format is only starting to function now.

In relation to the LRA, we would like to see simplified procedures in general and dispute procedures in particular, as well as a clearer definition of unfair labour practices. When unfair labour practices were first codified in the 1988 amendments we were quite apprehensive, but the codification worked quite well. Now that the earlier situation has been restored one is almost forced to test everything in court.

We also believe the Industrial Court rules are too complex. Unless a worker has an attorney or union, he has no hope of finding his way through.

**What is FEDSAL's role in the NEF?**

FEDSAL must bring its influence to bear at meetings of the NEF. In order to do this successfully, we are at present working on proposals for economic policy. Once this task has been completed, it will not only be submitted to the NEF, but also serve as the basis for our participation in meetings of the NEF.

**Is it true that COSATU is leading the way on labour issues?**

COSATU is in fact playing a leading role on labour issues. The fact that COSATU has a formidable infrastructure and other resources at its disposal enables it to play its present role effectively. We are quite happy to give credit for the role they play. But we also raise issues. For example we were the first to raise the issue of VAT on union dues. We have also raised the issue of the government's proposed tax on pension fund contributions and we managed to stop that.

**When you talk about FEDSAL being a moderate voice of labour what does that mean?**

We are clearly perceived to be moderate in relation to those federations which participate in party political activity. Our particular image therefore stems from the fact that we restrict ourselves to purely economic, labour and consumer issues. That does not mean that we will not use every means at our disposal to advance the interests of our members. Our style is one of negotiation rather than one of mass action, hence the reference to our moderate voice.

**You say that FEDSAL is not opposed to striking in principle. Do your affiliates ever use industrial action?**

Our unions all support the right to strike and believe it should be used if necessary, and it has been used as a weapon in the past, the recent SABC debacle being a case in point. Another example is that during 1990 the administrative staff at the airport closed down the tills. This stoppage was quite effective – it was settled quickly.

We also use the press quite effectively. For example, our members at Bankorp, just before the formation of ABSA, had a problem with retrenchments. The main problem was the lack of consultation, and the manner of retrenching. Office people are very secure and you can imagine the shock when someone suddenly gets a letter saying he or she is retrenched. FEDSAL went to press on the issue and had

very good results – they got a better retrenchment package and retrenchment procedure.

**What is the structure of FEDSAL?**

Our administrative component is much smaller than the other federations – a general secretary and an administrator. Our policy-making body is the National Executive Committee (NEC) which meets once a month with a representative from each affiliate. We have a National conference once a year where the president and vice-president are elected. We rely very much on the support of the office-bearers. We have discussions and distribute tasks.

**Do you have any regional structures?**

Not at this stage, but we have appointed some people to help out in the regions. They would be officials of our member unions who would carry out various tasks for FEDSAL as well.

The day to day work of our affiliates is to represent their members, take up court cases, to run and lease their buildings, administer medical aid. Members often phone in with problems. A lot of unions are overloaded with cases.

To be blunt the unions have more money than FEDSAL. The members of the NEC of FEDSAL – 18 people – are at our disposal to help. The experience lies around the table.

**If FEDSAL is to become more powerful as an organisation does it not need more money from the affiliates?**

That is right.

**What is the role of FEDSAL in relation to its affiliates?**

FEDSAL provides a platform for the individual unions. There is power in numbers, so if the unions want to take up a matter with the minister, FEDSAL can do it. The unions in FEDSAL also share a lot of information on how to run a union, on admin issues and on worker issues. We do not have a researcher. We help each other with new ideas – it is like a family business. We arrange seminars through FEDSAL, invite overseas visitors through FEDSAL and people make contacts. The



*Dannhauser van der Merwe*

*Photo: William Matlala*

aspect that could be developed is research but that takes money and we do the best with what we have.

FEDSAL is the moderate voice that people wanted to hear. At one stage we were seen as just opposing COSATU because of our views on the economy and mass stayaways. But our aim is not to go out and differ with them. We are seeing each other more often than before. We want to agree as far as possible. Politics and ideology are where we differ. FEDSAL is orientated towards the free market economy, but while we do not want to change the system, we want to improve it.

**What is the future of relations between black and white workers? What is the role of FEDSAL in this, and in particular how do you see affirmative action?**

It can be difficult. At federation level you see each other and speak to each other – but at the ground level you might still get differences. For example in Transnet there was a SARHWU strike, in Bloemfontein. They got very militant and even attacked some of our members. Most of our members are still whites in Transnet. It was a colour issue. The Artisan Staff Association and SARHWU had to sign an agreement that we are all workers – let us not fight each other. We had to agree that we should not use violence against each other.

Things like that can affect working relations.

The future relations between black and white workers will be no different than the general relations between all the peoples of this country. That will by and large be determined by progress in the political arena. FEDSAL tries to ignore colour.

Affirmative action has an impact on two

parties – the one at the bottom who is coming up, and the one at the top who is being moved aside. FEDSAL has both black and white members so it will be affected. We will play a role in finding solutions that are as harmonious as possible and are reasonable for all. We believe affirmative action should be based on merit rather than simply on colour. ☆

## Broadcasting staff strike for the first time ever

**T**he SABC, with 5 500 full-time employees and about 20 000 freelancers, has at least five unions trying to organise its members. These include the all-white Mineworkers Union (tiny), the Pretoria-based Media and Allied Workers Union (tiny), the SA Union of Journalists (150), the Media Workers Association of SA (950) and the SA Broadcasting Staff Association (1 800).

SABSA, which recently affiliated to the Federation of SA Labour (FEDSAL), is the oldest and biggest of the SABC's unions. It is almost entirely white and has technical and administrative staff as its members as well as a handful of journalists. For the first time in its 40 year history, it took industrial action last month and forced SABC to slightly improve its wage offer (from 7,5% to 7,56%) and to grant a performance based merit increase (for 30% of SABSA members equivalent to 1,1% of the total SABSA wage bill), as well as a once off non-pensionable cash bonus of three days pay, before the parties settled. SABSA members will not be paid for the days they took industrial action.

The SABSA action was limited, but because of the strategic location of some of its members it was potentially highly effective. A single member in a well-placed technical job could disrupt a programme by refusing to work, for example. However, SABSA leadership undermined the effectiveness of those actions its members did take by agreeing from the outset to warn management of where it would be taking action. So, for example, SABC was able to

replace the 40 SABSA members who refused to work on the filming of the Comrades Marathon without too much trouble.

What was interesting about the dispute was that SABC management seemed determined to try and smash the action from the outset. It took the highly unusual step of locking out SABSA members (after over 70% had voted in favour of industrial action) and withholding their May salary packages in an effort to compel them to work on SABC's terms. This had the combined effect of causing a number of SABSA members to resign (sources say about 200 left the union during the strike) and hardening the determination of another faction to continue their selective actions. SABC management (who are currently enjoying a honeymoon relationship with MWASA's leadership since last year's strike) were especially contemptuous of SABSA during the whole dispute and seemed not to believe that it would end in industrial action.

The fact that the action, limited though it was, resulted in SABC upping its offer indicates that it must have had some impact on SABC operations. Although unions like SAUJ pledged solidarity with SABSA, and refused to do their work, there was no joint planning with other unions in the SABC around the action. In fact relations between SABSA and MWASA are hostile with some MWASA members openly indicating their willingness to scab on SABSA because of SABSA's opposition to MWASA's strike last year. ◆



KARL VON HOLDT attended the FEDSAL annual conference – and discovered the fastest growing federation in SA.

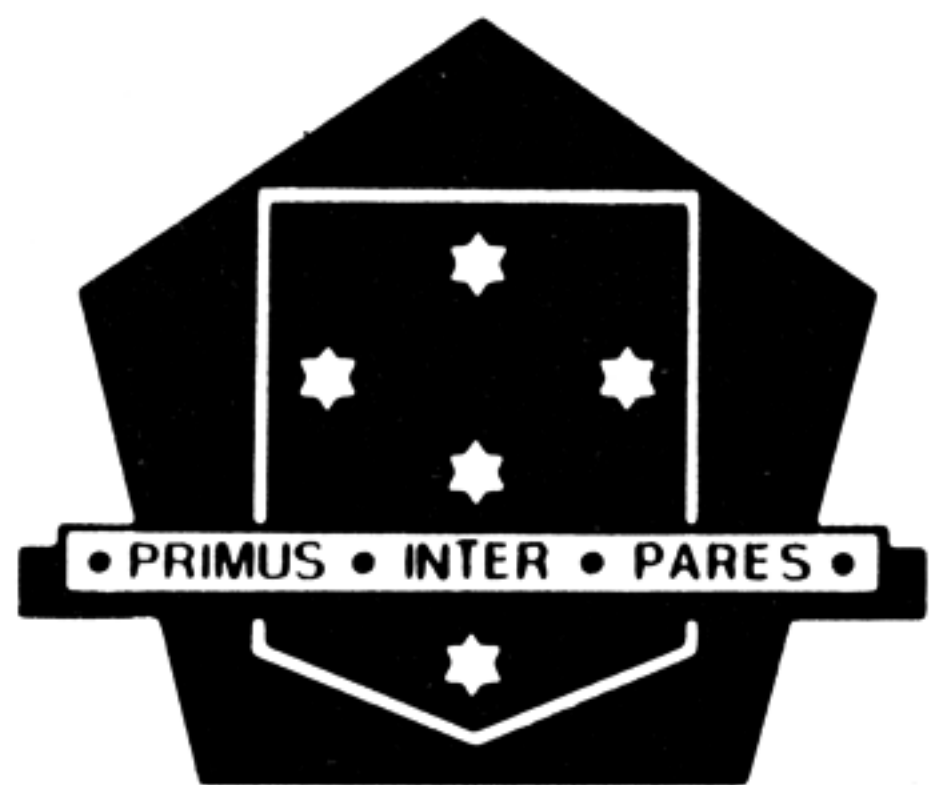
The mood at the Federation of SA Labour Unions (FEDSAL) annual conference was confident. FEDSAL is the only labour federation which has managed not only to maintain its membership figures through the current recession, but actually to grow through the affiliation of new unions (see table). FEDSAL's 17 affiliates now boast 270 000 members, compared to 230 000 in 14 affiliates a year ago.

"FEDSAL has shown exceptional growth over the past year, and we have expanded into new areas, with tremendous potential for further growth," said FEDSAL president Johann du Plessis in his presidential report. "FEDSAL is now indisputably in the number two spot, and therefore has every reason to try harder."

FEDSAL sees itself as a moderate trade union centre, rather than a white-collar federation. NMC chair Frans Barker emphasised this point in his address to the conference. FEDSAL he said, is very important as a moderating force in the centre. On the shopfloor too, FEDSAL could work to limit intimidation and polarisation. "FEDSAL seems to have built a degree of trust with organisations to the left of the political spectrum. You should be careful not to lose relations with the centre and the right," he said.

But although FEDSAL has both blue-collar and white-collar affiliates, its growth has been in the area of white-collar workers, and this seems likely to continue. FEDSAL is emerging as the federation of white-collar workers. As it does so, the organisation's racial complexion is likely to become an increasing problem for it. There will

## *'in the number two spot'*



# FEDSAL

be a growing number of black white-collar workers as SA democratises, and they will become increasingly assertive, both in the workplace and in the staff associations they belong to.

At present FEDSAL has about 30% black members – but the leadership is dominated by whites. There was only 1 black delegate out of



*Delegates at the FEDSAL conference: looking ahead with confidence?*

*Photo: William Matlala*

a total of 43 at the conference.

Will black white-collar workers feel at home in these organisations? FEDSAL will have to face such questions with more urgency if it is to become a growing and dynamic force.

An example of the tensions it will face is the anxiety its members express over affirmative action. A number of questions were posed to Barker and guest-speaker Leon Louw on this issue (see also interview with Johann du Plessis and Dannhauser van der Merwe, p56). This will obviously be a key issue in a post-apartheid SA, and black members and white members will have opposing interests.

Will FEDSAL affiliates be able to find a creative way of facilitating affirmative action; or will they be driven by their white members into opposing affirmative action? Given the federation's weakness as a centre – with only one full-time official and an administrator – these questions will probably be addressed by the affiliates rather than by the federation as a whole.

At any rate, FEDSAL probably has little to fear from COSATU's ability to move into white-collar areas at this stage. Although COSATU has expressed the intention to start organising white-collar workers, its affiliates are steeped in the organising traditions and culture of blue-collar workers.

An example of this is the failure of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union to organise white-collar workers outside the bantustans.

The white-collar sector is of increasing strategic importance for the labour movement. While manufacturing unemployment fell by 46 000 to 1 380 000 last year, the financial sector increased by 5 000 to 186 000 and services by 26 000 to 1 326 000 (CSS in BUSINESS DAY, 18/2/93). The financial sector has doubled in size over the past 11 years (WEEKLY MAIL, 7/5/93). FEDSAL is well placed to benefit from this growth – and COSATU may be watching hungrily. Future developments should be interesting. ☆

## Annual conference – FEDSAL style

**A** FEDSAL conference is unlike a COSATU or NACTU congress. There were no political debates over policy or strategy, relations with political organisations or campaigns to be waged. There were three guest speakers – Frans Barker from the National Manpower Commission, Leon Louw from the Free Market Foundation and Toolsyraj Benydin of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).

FEDSAL president Johann du Plessis told LABOUR BULLETIN that relations with WCL are “informal and cordial”. It is FEDSAL policy to develop its international contacts: “Our opponents - the employers - do so continually and we need to catch up.” It is possible that FEDSAL could apply for affiliation to WCL in future, says Du Plessis, “but first we have to discuss it.”

The president reported to the conference that FEDSAL had successfully lobbied against the Jacobs Committee proposal that pension fund contributions be taxed. He also proposed that a common salary ceiling be adopted for the UIF, Worker’s Compensation and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Currently employees earning above R32 000 per annum are not protected by the BCOE Act, those earning above R45 000 cannot participate in the Workman’s Compensation Fund, and those earning above R58 000 are excluded from UIF. The conference agreed that these ceilings should be equalised or abolished, and that this issue should go to the NMC. ♦

### FEDSAL affiliates

### Membership

	<u>01/12/91</u>	<u>01/12/92</u>
ABSA Workers’ Union (ABSAWU)	8 500	8 500
Artisan Staff Association (ASA)	16 500	15 500
Eskom Employees’ Association (EEA)	7 000	6 000
Financial Institutions Workers’ Union (FIWU)	12 000	13 000
Industrial Salaried Staff Association (ISSAV)	4 000	4 000
Motor Industry Staff Association (MISA)	20 000	20 000
Nedcor Staff Society (NEDSTAFF)	6 000	6 000
SALSTAFF (SALSTAFF)	17 000	16 000
SA Association of Municipal Employees (SAAME)	48 000	50 000
SA Footplate Staff Association (SAFSA)	8 500	8 500
SA Hairdressers Employees’ Industrial Union (SAHEIU)	8 000	7 500
SA Society of Bank Officials (SASBO) Underground Officials’ Association of SA (UOA)	38 000	42 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>214 000</b>	<b>218 000</b>
<b>New affiliates (12 May 1993)</b>		
Hospital Personnel Association of SA		40 714
Post and TELKOM Association		12 673
SA Broadcasting Staff Association		1 612
UNISA Administrative and Professional Staff Union		809
<b>Total</b>		<b>55 808</b>



# *The trend towards* **bargained corporatism**



In the first of two articles, JEREMY BASKIN\* argues that the corporatist route is the only realistic one for the union movement, despite the many obstacles – not least the industrial relations system itself.

**“Nostalgia” lamented Groucho Marx, “isn’t what it used to be”. It’s pretty much the same with industrial relations; the 1990s are turning out very different from the ’80s.**

The National Economic Forum (NEF) and a revamped National Manpower Commission (NMC) and National Training Board (NTB) are signs of a trend towards greater, structured, involvement by unions in a range of issues. The trend towards active engagement is also noticeable at industry level. Unions are engaged in talks concerning tariffs and import policies, profit-sharing schemes, training and grading systems, and even the restructuring of their industries – a range of issues more complex and far-reaching than anything with which they have previously dealt.

At plant-level, a significant number of companies are introducing worker participation schemes, in the hope of winning greater co-operation from their employees. Many companies have been compelled to adopt this approach; hoping the carrot will work where the stick has failed.

The shift by unions away from adversarialism and towards engagement with a broader range of issues has been widely noted. Some have spoken of a new “strategic unionism” emerging, others of a shift “from resistance to reconstruction”.

The change should not, of course, be exaggerated. Worker combativeness remains, and there is still industrial conflict; and both are likely to continue. But, for the first time, greater co-operation with both state and

\* Baskin is a former unionist and author of *Striking Back – a history of COSATU*. This article is based on a much longer paper produced for the Centre for Policy Studies, PO Box 16488, Doornfontein, 2028.

employer is now possible. Unions have the chance to influence the macro-environment which fundamentally determines what happens to their members at home and at work. Not surprisingly, the union movement is grabbing this opportunity.



bind organised labour and a political party to the achievement of common objectives (as in Australia). But a corporatist system does not need to rest on a formal social contract. And

### The trend towards corporatism

At the macro-level, the features which are emerging include:

- institutional arrangements which allow organised labour and organised capital a role in the formulation of economic policy, together with the state. The NEF is the obvious, but not the only, example;
- a role for business and labour in monitoring and regulating particular economic phenomena, especially the labour market and industrial relations.

The logic of this approach must lead – as it already is doing – to the acceptance by all parties, but especially unions, of some restraint, in exchange for – in the unions' case – a share in economic policy-making and other gains for members and/or the working class (for example jobs, housing, education, training).

It is hard to avoid seeing in this a trend towards corporatism\*. But this is not, clearly, the corporatism of fascist Italy or authoritarian Latin America – with the state controlling or collaborating with puppet unions. The developments here have emerged through struggle and are closer (but still different) to the European social-democratic paradigm. The major players retain their organisational independence, and frequently conflict with each other, even as they try to co-operate and find common goals. What is emerging is best described as 'bargained corporatism'. We are not yet a corporatist society, but we are en route to becoming one.

Some commentators incorrectly equate social contracts with corporatism. It is true that formalised pacts or accords, either tripartite or between capital and labour only, are often a feature of corporatism; and pacts frequently

a social contract (such as in UK in the 70s) does not imply a corporatist system – unless it produces an ongoing, structured relationship between the social partners, and a web of collaborative interchanges.

Also, corporatism is often associated with tripartism – institutionalised state, employer and union interaction. But, in practice, it can accommodate a range of forms at different levels including bilateral negotiations between employers and unions with little active state involvement. The NMC, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a tripartite body, but rather a bilateral one with state participation. And macro-corporatist arrangements are being echoed at the enterprise and industrial levels, but with little, if any, state involvement.

Many, on both the right and the left, are sceptical of the direction industrial relations is taking; and perhaps they are right to be. I will return to some of these criticisms shortly. But the argument is extremely persuasive that the corporatist path (although it is rarely called that) is the most realistic option for the union movement to take.

### The case for bargained corporatism

Four inter-related arguments, and their specific implications for unions, can be identified:

1. The transition period requires maximum possible social consensus, despite the limits this places on necessary and far-reaching change. Only relative stability can lead to economic certainty and predictability. These, in turn, can (will?) result in positive political and economic outcomes – democracy and sustainable growth, respectively.

Extreme conflict undermines democracy and this is bad for unions, which need a democratic environment to operate most effectively. Democracy in South Africa will be fragile. It will need the support of institutional

\* *'concertation' might be a better term; but since it is not an English word I have avoided it*

arrangements which can channel conflict, moderate it where appropriate, and resolve competing claims on national resources.



In a society attempting a democratic transition, one should be wary of concluding too much from corporatist experiences in advanced industrial economies whose relatively stable democratic systems are unlike our own. Negative consequences for labour in those societies may be outweighed here by the pressing need to stabilise democracy.

2. There are strong economic reasons for corporatism. South Africa is in serious economic trouble; the economy contracted by over 2% in 1992. When population growth is factored in, the decline in per capita income is alarming. Unemployment is soaring, and investment and savings are well below the levels needed for future growth.

The problems are not primarily cyclical or simply the product of a protracted transition – though, of course, both factors are relevant. Rather they reflect deep structural problems and a decline which began in the 1970s. No political party or economic class is strong enough, alone, to reverse these trends and effect economic restructuring. But both capital and organised labour are strong enough to block key changes.

Economic growth is in the interests of both capital and labour, even if they differ over how best to achieve it and how to distribute its fruits. Growth is insufficient without redistribution; redistributive strategies, without growth, are nothing more than a one-off solution. Unless the cake grows the outlook is bleak. And without agreed economic policies the cake will not grow.

3. Not all the arguments are negative. For the unions it brings a meaningful say, for the first time, in the development of national economic policy. No longer would they be only on the receiving end of government pronouncements. In addition, it would place socio-economic policy-making in the open and acknowledge the influence of key players. At present big business already helps shape economic policy. But this is done, often informally, in ways

which encourage special interest pleading and discourage transparency.

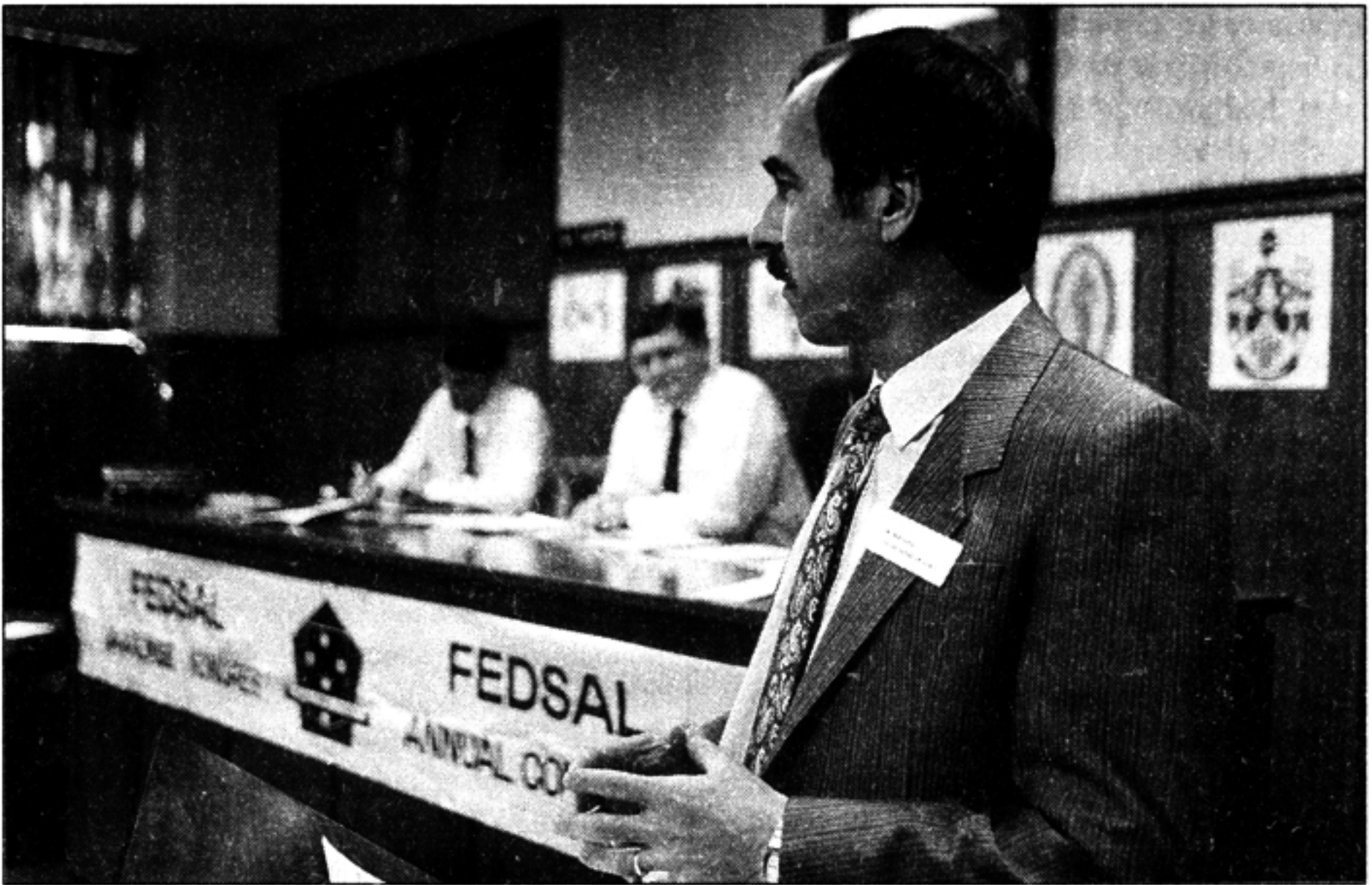
The structural changes which the economy needs will undoubtedly include hardships and dislocation. An

active industrial policy, for example, will see some industries decline while others are actively encouraged. Union involvement can help guide the process, and also cushion workers from some of the negative effects – through re-training programmes, controlled industrial restructuring, appropriate redundancy and employment programmes, linking productivity and job security deals, and so on.

Finally, the corporatist approach can try to ensure that conflict over resources is not a zero-sum game – even if it cannot make everyone a “winner”. The challenge is to develop an economy which is both productive and profitable, bringing increased employment, higher wages and improved social services. A structured relationship between capital and labour, rooted less in adversarialism and more in co-operation, stands the best chance of delivering social and economic outcomes favourable to both sides.

4. Simply put, all the alternatives are worse. Three other options suggest themselves.

- Revolution – given the domestic and international situation, does any significant grouping believe that an organised seizure of power, and revolutionary rupture, are on the agenda?
- The firm hand option is popular in many establishment circles. “Law and order” is its cry, authoritarian rule its vision. It envisages a strong government taming the union movement, thereby giving itself greater freedom to restructure the economy. But the current government has already tried this and failed. A democratic government might have greater legitimacy to pursue this option (“low intensity democracy”), but in the short- to medium-term is unlikely to have either the political will or the muscle to act against its own support base.
- The status quo option allows industrial relations to continue as at present. Each



*Labour can be a participant, an observer, or a victim: NMC chairperson Frans Barker addressing a union conference*

*Photo: William Matlala*

party continues to try to get what it can out of the other and to pressure government to concede its demands. This can be expected to lead, at one extreme, to macro-economic populism; a short boom followed by hyperinflation and economic crisis. Alternatively perpetual conflict over economic priorities may lead to a "lame duck" outcome; limping along with low growth rates in slow, but inevitable, decline. In both cases, democracy is likely to be an early victim, with the union movement losing heavily.

For the unions the status quo option means "defend your gains and fight the bosses for more". These are laudable aims but entirely inadequate to the changing situation in South Africa. At worst it is class struggle without vision; at best a holding action which only delays the inevitable. Ironically, many major employers are committed to the status quo option. For them it means managing labour conflict in the knowledge (hope?) that the union movement is in slow, inevitable decline.

In practice this means bypassing unions where possible, and weakening them (or making concessions) where necessary.

It seems to me that in the process of transition and development labour must either be a participant, an observer or a victim; and that clearly participation is the optimum route. On balance, it is hard to fault those who see bargained corporatism as the best available option or, more pessimistically, the least worst alternative. However many criticisms remain and we can touch briefly on some of these, before exploring some of the major limits of the corporatist approach.

### **Some critical views**

Many have warned against an elite bargain – a social contract between employers, employees and the state "...to the general disadvantage of other interest groups...such as consumers and taxpayers" (Vorhies); or argued that "...corporatist arrangements which exclude weaker parties might well leave them worse off than they would be under unregulated market

arrangements" (Simkins); or simply cautioned against the exclusion of large "marginal" groupings who find it "difficult to organise and speak" (Friedman).



"The concept conjures up," argues one columnist, "visions of prices and incomes policies and protectionist practices that create inflexible structures. It evokes images of a cosy cartel of powerful interest groups, with no representation for the unemployed, the rural workers, small businesses and consumers" (FINANCIAL MAIL 27/11/92). Finance Minister Keys has, perhaps, strengthened these fears by referring to the "golden triangle" – employers, labour and the state.

The union movement has been sensitive to the elite bargain charge, but perhaps excessively so. COSATU's much-publicised reconstruction accord is an explicit attempt to bind the ANC to a "war on poverty". In addition union emphasis at the NEF has been on practical job creation proposals; even including a willingness to relax certain labour standards to achieve this goal. In collective bargaining, unions have frequently offered to trade wage restraint for a moratorium on retrenchments. All these actions are explicitly aimed at including the excluded, not creating a cocoon around organised labour.

This is not to say that the interests of organised labour are identical to those of, say, the rural poor or the mass of farmworkers. One must also accept that, especially with protracted economic decline, employers and unions may tend to favour protectionist deals\*. But, if there is to be an elite bargain in South Africa, its parties are far more likely to be the "golden triangle" of state, employer and (enlarged) black middle class, than organised labour. If anything, the institutionalised participation of organised labour acts as a counterweight to this.

"But will such an approach bring us closer to our goal of socialism?" is a question often heard. It is difficult to answer this directly, because it depends on how one defines

socialism. If it is held to comprise one or all of the following – proletarian revolution, worker control of the means of production, the subordination of the market – then

corporatism is not a step towards socialism. Those who hold these goals are obliged to reject corporatist arrangements which amount to what one academic has termed "state structured class collaboration".

If, however, socialism is defined less ambitiously – as a striving for "freedom, justice and solidarity" (Harrington) – then bargained corporatism is less problematic. Indeed, from this perspective corporatism is undoubtedly a product of working class struggles and organisation. Progressive developments are more likely "where the strength of the labour movement is officially recognized" (McLennan).

In short, corporatist arrangements can achieve social (socialist?) progress, but are unlikely to lead to dramatic systemic change. The question is then, how far-reaching will any changes be?

Some have criticised the current trends on the grounds that it promotes democratic rupture – a growing gap between leaders and members within the unions. This point is valid and, indeed, the signs of it have been apparent even before the 1990s. Any approach in which the upper levels (either at NEF or at industry-level talks) set the framework for the enterprise or company levels always carries this danger. The challenge is to find ways of avoiding or minimising it.

All these criticisms are, to some extent, valid. But it is hard to see them as fatal flaws which make an alternative route more attractive for the labour movement.

### Can it deliver?

Unfortunately, even if one accepts that the corporatist route is the only realistic option available, a range of obstacles still stand in the way of success. The current path can, at best, deliver incremental changes – improved

\* As I will argue in the next issue of *Labour Bulletin*, the existing industrial relations framework makes this more likely.



conditions, increased employment levels, better education and training, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and so on. There remain real questions as to whether it can 'deliver' even these.



there is an established tradition of unions and employers reaching compromise settlements and package deals, even after the most extreme conflicts.

Economically, the challenge is enormous. Without real growth the chance of developing agreed policies is sharply reduced. Competing demands, and the clear need for redistribution, can best be accommodated when the national economic cake is growing. This is a real dilemma – economic crisis is both a reason for developing consensual policies, and an obstacle to the chances of corporatist success.

Worse, the modern economy is less confined within national boundaries and less susceptible to regulation than before. International economic realities – particularly the ease with which capital can move, and production and skilled individuals relocate – place real limits on the policies which can be adopted.

The professionalism and capacity of the union movement is another problem. The sort of interactions which are already emerging at the NEF and at industrial (and even plant-level) negotiations, require sophisticated interventions. The union movement has real problems, not only in getting membership understanding and acceptance of complex policies, but even in developing such policies in the first place. On balance, when it comes to capacity the union movement is no match for its intended corporatist partners.

Questions also emerge around representivity. Union membership is currently only 23% of the economically active population – although it is significantly higher in the core industrial sectors. COSATU members make up only half of the total. What muscle will the unions be able to exert to achieve their key socio-economic demands? And to what extent do high unemployment levels place standing limits on potential union power?

Ideologically, too, it can be argued that the union movement is ill-equipped for the corporatist approach. The culture of adversarialism runs deep – on the side of both employers and workers. On the other hand,

All of which suggests that although the corporatist route may be the only realistic option, it is by no means an easy one. In many respects the labour movement is caught between a rock and a hard place. There are some obvious things to do, some of which are already happening. It can take steps to increase its capacity – organisationally and in respect of policy development. It can try to construct a new vision (the reconstruction accord?) to guide it through changing times. It can take the "soft pacts" route – focusing on a limited range of issues where it can exert real influence.

Through all of this, one key point is generally ignored – the corporatist direction being taken and the existing industrial relations system, are in fundamental contradiction. While the former tries to move away from simple adversarialism, the latter encourages its continuation. While the corporatist approach implies a defined role for labour in society, the existing industrial relations system continually questions its right to exist (as the Checkers strike makes clear).

Tacking a corporatist head onto an Anglo-Saxon body of industrial relations is unlikely to work – at least not for the unions. The present union approach faces enough obstacles as it is; in the face of the present industrial relations system it must surely founder. The need to re-think the Wiehahn model will be the subject of the second part of this article, to be published in the next issue of LABOUR BULLETIN. ☆

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# SADTU teachers *strike back*

On 15 May 1993, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) called for an indefinite teachers' strike, which was to begin nine days later. This was the first time in the history of South African education that a teachers' organisation had declared a formal labour dispute with the Department of National Education (DNE), resulting in the mobilisation of thousands of teachers for a national strike across ethnic departments of education. And perhaps, for the first time also, a teachers' organisation had assumed the centre-stage of the education struggle in our country.

SADTU's strike announcement, following closely on the widespread secondary students' actions against an increase in the matriculation examination fees, added a new dimension to the education struggle in our country. Its practical implications were that hundreds of thousands of students and their teachers were to engage in separate, but co-ordinated actions after the NECC's Education Summit, to bring a halt to formal education nationally.

Although the strike itself was averted through the personal intervention of ANC President, Nelson Mandela, and the subsequent negotiations between SADTU and the education authorities, the union has scored significant organisational, political and labour victories. But the strike call was not without its problems, particularly among black parents.

Likewise, the suspension of the strike by the

The national teachers strike was called off when the government agreed to negotiate teachers grievances and set up a national forum to address the education crisis. ISMAIL VADI\* argues that SADTU's mobilisation for the strike led to political and organisational breakthroughs.

union leadership after preliminary negotiations did not meet with a positive reaction from some SADTU regions and branches, particularly in the Western Cape and Soweto.

## **Strike ballot**

SADTU's decision to embark on strike action followed two prior developments.

The first was the sudden termination of salary negotiations between the public sector unions/teacher organisations and the relevant government departments through the direct intervention of President de Klerk. At a

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\* SADTU National Vice-President and Lecturer in the Education Department, University of the Witwatersrand



*Randall van der Heever, general secretary of SADTU*

*Photo: William Matlala*

meeting on 15 January 1993 in Pretoria, De Klerk was adamant that his government would offer a 5% salary increment to teachers and public sector workers as from 1 July 1993, and not a cent more! His pronouncement effectively strangled to death a tentative process of negotiations between the government and public/education sector representatives.

The second was the national strike ballot conducted by SADTU early in May this year. The result was that of the two-thirds of union members balloted, more than 90% favoured strike action to bring the education crisis to a head and to force the government to re-open negotiations over teacher salaries. Teacher exasperation, and their consequent willingness to embark on strike action, must be seen against the background of several earlier "department-specific" disputes, which had served to fuel their militancy.

### **Teacher grievances**

In April already, 29 000 Transkei teachers were on strike in protest against the unequal

salary packages for male and female teachers. They demanded parity back-pay for female teachers from 1 July 1991 to 30 June 1992 (which all other teachers have enjoyed over this period).

Similarly, early in May, 8 000 teachers in the Department of Education and Culture (Indian): House of Delegates were on "chalksdown" against the premature payment (while negotiations were continuing) of two teacher incentive schemes known as the "merit" and the "departmental specific" awards.

In the Department of Education and Culture (Coloured): House of Representatives, a protracted and intensive campaign against rationalisation and teacher retrenchments had been waged by several thousand teachers since October last year. What this struggle highlighted in particular was the attempt of apartheid education planners to restructure education unilaterally before any meaningful negotiations could begin over a future, post-apartheid system of education.

Finally, the non-recognition of SADTU by

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the education administrations in KwaZulu, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and the all-white House of Assembly has generated insecurity and anger among SADTU teachers employed under these departments.

This is being perceived by SADTU members as political obstructionism by conservative politicians, as the union has already won formal recognition from the DNE, the Department of Education and Training (DET), the House of Delegates, the House of Representatives and the military government of Transkei (Recognition Agreements are to be concluded shortly with the education authorities of the remaining self-governing territories).

### Teacher demands

The above grievances in specific departments served as the backdrop to the growing dissatisfaction of teachers. However, the central focus of the strike call was the demand to re-open negotiations on teacher salaries and to stop teacher retrenchments. Teacher demands in relation to the strike therefore embraced both the specific and national

### SA Education Departments

There are 19 different education departments in SA - a result of the fragmenting effect of apartheid. The important ones referred to in this article are:

- The Department of National Education (DNE):** this is an umbrella co-ordinating body responsible for education training; salaries and conditions of employment; curricula and exams, etc.
- Department of Education and Training (DET):** responsible for African schooling outside the bantustans.
- Department of Education and Culture: House of Representatives (HOR):** responsible for coloured schooling.
- Department of Education and Culture: House of Delegates (HOD):** responsible for Indian schooling.

grievances.

- an end to unilateral restructuring of education;
- the re-opening of negotiations around salaries;
- a living wage for underpaid teachers;
- an end to rationalisation and retrenchment of teachers;
- collective bargaining rights for teachers;
- the right to organise and the recognition of SADTU in Bantustans such as KwaZulu, Ciskei and Bophuthatswana;
- parity back-pay for female educators in the Transkei; and,
- the reversal of the Merit and Specific Awards in the Department of Education and Culture (Indian): House of Delegates.

### Negotiations

As 80 000 teachers - one-third of the total teaching corps - were set to embark on a nation-wide strike, thereby threatening to plunge black education into a major crisis a few weeks before the mid-year examinations, Mandela took the initiative to open direct talks with De Klerk. Meanwhile, COSATU and its five public sector affiliates placed their "full weight" behind the teacher action.

After two days of intensive discussions the government agreed to the "establishment of an Education Forum .... before the end of June", which would "address the principle of examination fees .... the fundamental restructuring of education and all the problems relating to retrenchments". It acknowledged that the 5% salary increase is "inadequate and that there are special categories in the teaching profession as well as the civil service which merit sympathetic attention". It agreed also to re-open negotiations with the relevant parties to resolve other education disputes. At the same time the DET announced the suspension of the matric examination fees for this year.

While Mandela's intervention paved the way for renewed negotiations between SADTU and the DNE, the DET instituted a court interdict preventing SADTU and absurdly, 60 000 teachers under its employ,



from going on strike.

The SADTU negotiating team, caught between the conflicting pressures of Mandela's facilitation process, the DET court interdict and membership pressure to continue with the strike as planned, entered into preliminary discussions with the DNE on 21 May.

### Agreement

After an exhaustive nine hour meeting, an agreement was hammered out between the union and education authorities. In return for the indefinite suspension of the strike, the DNE agreed to the following:

- 1 Salary negotiations, which would be particularly focused on the lower categories of teachers, will be opened within four weeks of the agreement.
- 2 No new rationalisation programmes will be implemented, and teacher-pupil ratios and staff establishments will be referred to the National Education and Training Forum (NETF) for re-consideration (Facilitation Committee met on the same day to determine the composition, terms of reference and time-frame for the NETF).

- 3 The 'merit award system' will be reviewed in all education departments and the specific dispute in the House of Delegates will be subjected to third party mediation.

- 4 Sam de Beer, DET Minister, will meet with the education authorities in KwaZulu, Ciskei and Bophuthatswana to discuss SADTU's recognition.

- 5 A Technical Committee will be established to ensure parity back-pay for female teachers in Transkei.

- 6 Labour legislation for teachers, which will include the right to strike action by teachers, will be considered in parliament as a matter of urgency.

- 7 The DET also undertook to postpone its application for an interdict pending the final outcome of negotiations.

### Union gains

SADTU has hailed the agreement as a victory for "teacher trade unionism in South Africa". More significant is the fact that the union has strengthened its organisational capacity in the build-up to the strike. For the first time branch structures nationally have had to consult



members directly on the strike ballot question, leading to a heightened consciousness among teachers on issues such as teacher unionism, labour relations and strike activity. Teachers have finally come to appreciate the bargaining value of their collective power and the utility of the strike tactic.

This is evident from the sharp increase in union membership recently. SADTU's membership has risen by 20 000 in the last three months. The most impressive increase has been among coloured teachers in the Western Cape and the Transvaal. It is this shift in allegiance of coloured teachers to SADTU that in part explains the surprising announcement by the traditional United Teachers Associations of South Africa (UTASA) to organise a chalksdown if the relevant education department did not back down on its retrenchment and rationalisation programme. This was after it had publicly distanced itself from SADTU's strike call.

The other area which has recorded a sizeable increase in membership has been Natal. In particular, several thousand KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture teachers

have joined SADTU, and have embarked on a wildcat strike to secure union recognition. This surge in membership, at least in the black urban areas of the province, has paved the way for greater non-racial interaction among teachers and a more politically assertive teacher presence in the region.

Finally, formally-retrenched white teachers, predominantly Afrikaans-speaking, who have secured temporary employment in some HOD ("Indian") schools have joined SADTU's Lenasia and Johannesburg branches. Although very small in number, their joining the union does reveal an interesting development – that given exposure to the actual processes of teacher unionism, South African white teachers are not as a matter of principle opposed to a teachers' union.

### Organisational problems

The teachers' strike call was not without its problems. Black parents in townships who have witnessed the repeated disruption of their children's schooling for almost two decades were naturally concerned about the prospect of a prolonged teachers' strike. More

fundamentally, their criticisms stemmed from the fact that there was little or no consultation with school-based parent and broader community structures.

They argued that they had simply heard of the strike through the media and that it was the union's responsibility to inform them of teacher campaigns and actions. However, as the processes of consultation unfolded in the few days before the strike, there was significant understanding of the teachers' cause and demands.

Only in one area, Phoenix in Durban, did parents express open hostility towards teachers who were already on a chalksdown by preventing them from entering school premises. The lesson to be learnt from this experience is that thorough discussion with parent/community/student structures is vital if any future strike is contemplated by SADTU.

The second difficulty sprang from the SADTU leadership's decision to suspend the strike even before it had begun. Members in several regions pointed to the lack of clarity in the agreement reached between SADTU and the government education departments around issues such as retrenchments and the salary package, and felt that the decision to suspend the strike was announced prematurely. In addition, they accused the leadership of signing the agreement and releasing media statements without prior consultation within union structures.

It is this dissatisfaction that in part explains the decisions of the SADTU Western Cape and Southern Transvaal regions to continue with preparations and campaigning for the strike until clarity was obtained in the course of further negotiations. The general public wrongly perceived this as acts of defiance by teachers on the ground against the union's leadership.

These tactical differences were resolved at a Special SADTU National Executive Committee meeting where all regions agreed to suspend the strike. SADTU is to review this position and the progress in negotiations over teachers' demands at its National Congress scheduled for early July. Even then the

SADTU Soweto branch was not convinced, and only after a week-long process of consultations with teachers, did it finally support the national position.

### **Political developments**

The teachers' strike developed as an explicit labour dispute in the context of delicate multi-party political negotiations. Liberation movements across the ideological spectrum expressed misgivings and concerns about the possibility of prolonged disruptions of formal schooling and the on-going erosion of the culture of learning and teaching. This is a political response that is understandable.

But it must also be noted that the student mass actions led by COSAS and the possibility of a national strike under SADTU's banner has forced the apartheid government to concede on a fundamental demand made at the Broederstroom Education Conference in March 1992 – the immediate establishment of a National Education and Training Forum to address crisis issues in education and to negotiate the transition to a post-apartheid education system. That the government has agreed to establish such a Forum by the end of June 1993, after stalling on the matter for over 15 months, is a major political victory for the democratic movement.

### **Conclusion**

This was SADTU's first attempt at organising a national strike of South African teachers. Mistakes have been made. At the same time important victories have been scored, leading to the empowerment of a sector that has long been subjected to intensely authoritarian and bureaucratic forms of control. That unquestioning subservience of teachers to education authorities has finally been broken. It is against this background that South Africa's only non-racial teachers' union stands poised to debate its affiliation to COSATU at its July Congress. ☆



# **COSATU, the ICFTU,** *and dictatorships in Asia*

Trade unionists of Asia appeal to COSATU not to affiliate to ICFTU  
before demanding its report

**W**e write as worker leaders who have been directly engaged in the establishment of independent unionism in our countries for decades. We wish to put a particular point of view to COSATU. We wish to debate with you because our members are becoming aware of COSATU's key role in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. Asian workers are beginning to request more material on your long, hard, but successful struggle.

Asian workers are also becoming conscious of the fact that COSATU is genuinely internationalist and as such is prepared to play a leadership role in the struggle for working

people's freedom – a freedom that is *genuine*, not a middle class and ruling elite liberation. COSATU's interest in the struggles of working men and women in the newly industrializing countries in Asia inspires us in the difficult circumstances we find ourselves in.

Sadly, Asian workers have not yet achieved recognition of their basic rights as workers. Many of COSATU's leaders will remember that time in South Africa, prior to union recognition in 1979. Before 1979, your independent unions had no bargaining rights; the Apartheid regime banned many of your leaders and the employers victimized your

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*This paper has been endorsed by the following people in their personal capacities, after extensive workshopping of ideas:*

*Australia: Rob Meecham (Trades and Labour Council (TLC) of Western Australia, Secretary); Rob Lambert (TLC of Western Australia, Co-ordinator, Indian Ocean Regional Initiative); Keith Pekham (President of the Metal and Engineering Workers Union). Malaysia: Arokia Dass (Secretary of Transport and Allied Workers Union); Abdul Latiff Che Din (National Union of Smelting Workers); K Veeriah (National Union of Rubber Workers); Yusma Mahammed (Organiser, Electronics Workers); Jack Clancy (Centre for the Progress of Peoples). Activists from certain countries cannot be named for security reasons.*



shop stewards. Here in Asia, we are as you were in the 1960s and 1970s. Our unions are not recognized either by the state or by the employers in many of our countries; our leaders are victimized, imprisoned, and in a number of instances killed. We live under dictatorships in various forms and we have no political or economic rights. Our wages and conditions are extremely poor, even though it is our hands and our minds that have played a role in the so called economic miracle of Asian development.

For these reasons, we would like to express a particular point of view that arises out of these difficult circumstances. We hope that this point of view will stimulate democratic debate within COSATU over the question of ICFTU affiliation. Clearly, the decision to affiliate or not to affiliate at this stage is a decision to be made by South African comrades. We only wish to point out possible consequences of such a decision for the future prospects of our struggle for democracy and freedom in Asia. We hope that you will take account of these issues in your debates in a spirit of solidarity with the workers of Asia.

### **The ICFTU visit to South Africa**

We read with interest, the LABOUR BULLETIN comments of the ICFTU leaders during their recent visit to South Africa, (Vol 17 No 1). If we accept that they are sincere, their comments reflect an important shift in ICFTU thinking.

Enzo Friso, the ICFTU general secretary, emphasized that the ICFTU is on the side of those fighting for freedom and democracy. He stated that the ICFTU is not an imperialist organization and that the main aim of the organization was "the fight against dictatorships". He also emphasized the importance of developing independent unionism and that the ICFTU was now going to target the democratization of those countries under dictatorships. The ICFTU was going "to fight everywhere for trade union rights".

Bob White, president of the Canadian Labour Congress and chair of the ICFTU's human rights committee went so far as to argue that criticism of ICFTU's base in the

undemocratic unions in the newly industrialised societies was "legitimate" and that these undemocratic centres should be expelled.

In terms of our situation, these perspectives are refreshing. We are however concerned that these view points be translated into practical policy in Asia. Such a change would necessitate a dramatic transformation of the ICFTU's role in Asia, its affiliation base and its organisational structures.

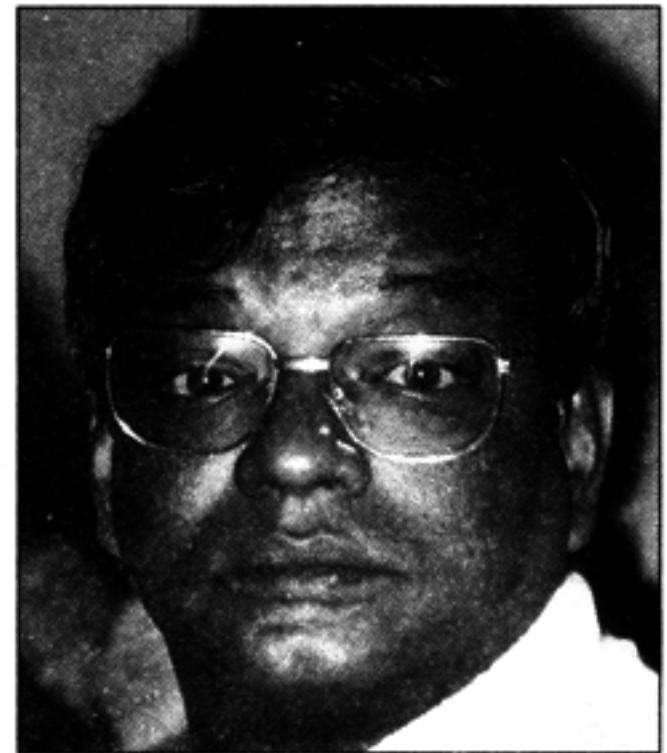
### **The present role and structure of the ICFTU in Asia**

The role of the ICFTU in Asia has been profoundly shaped by the dictates of the Cold War. The US government actively sought through its influence within the ICFTU to shield the Asian working classes from the spread of communism.

Trade union federations were to serve as protected zones. Thus the union federations affiliated to the ICFTU were in many instances set up by the *state* to control the working class, not to *represent* working class interests in any

way. These union federations have been labelled "yellow unions" because they became the sweethearts of the employers and the allies of the dictatorships. The multi-nationals loved them. These unions became a selling point for Asian governments as they actively tried to attract foreign investment by arguing that "their" working class was docile and hard working.

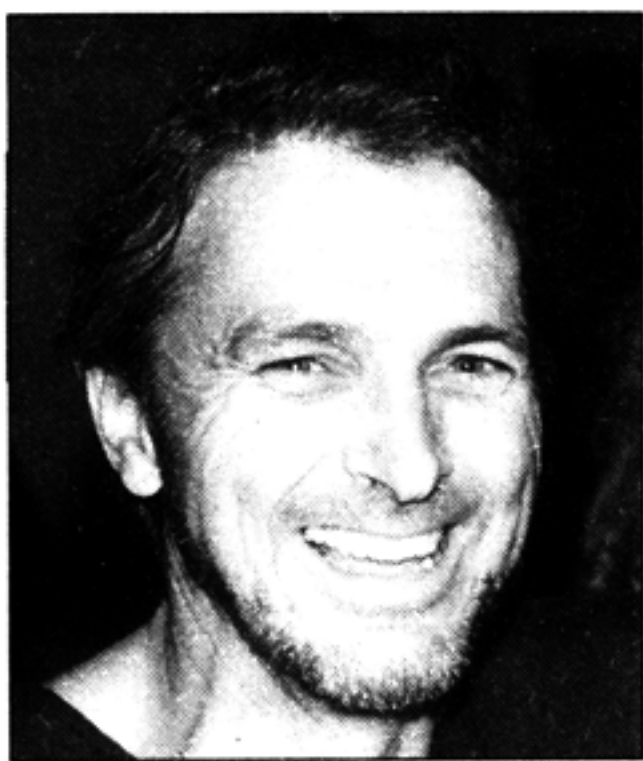
This "yellow" unionism which forms the foundation of the ICFTU in Asia, has taken different forms in different countries. In the



*Arokia Dass, contributor to this article*

## INTERNATIONAL

Philippines, the ICFTU affiliate is the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP). The TUCP was established in 1976 by the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, soon after the first resistance by workers under the Martial Law regime. Marcos wished to pre-empt the development of militant unionism as this would have undermined his political dictatorship and the image of cheap and controlled labour he sought to promote with the multi-national corporations. The unions that the TUCP brought under their umbrella had existed since the early 1950s. They were 'sweetheart' company unions, established by the employers.



*Rob Lambert, contributor*

In Malaysia, militant unionism was suppressed in the late 1940s. In 1950 the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, (MTUC), was established under the watchful eye of the newly independent state. In many instances, state

bureaucrats came to exert a high degree of control over the hand picked leaders of the MTUC. The result has been four decades of servile unionism that has not stood up for the rights of Malaysian workers. The ICFTU has colluded with this type of unionism by electing P P Narayanan, the general secretary of the National Union of Plantation Workers as the ICFTU's international president. Narayanan is also president of the MTUC. A rich analysis of the Malaysian labour situation (Dass, 1991, 57) has concluded,

"Narayanan's stepping stone to achieving control of the national labour movement and rising to power within the international body was that most vulnerable and neglected sector of Malaysian society: Indian plantation workers. During the NUPW's long and sordid

history, plantation workers have remained at the very bottom of the social order in Malaysia, and even to this day their conditions remain close to slavery. The reason: their union has never - despite its long established links with the wheels of power in the so-called international labour movement - fought for even the most basic rights for them"

In Indonesia, after the bloody 1965 coup, an event in which more people lost their lives than during the entire Vietnam war, independent unions were disbanded and replaced by military styled, state unionism. SPSI, the official state union federation in Indonesia and the only one tolerated by the dictatorship, is not yet recognized by the ICFTU. However, the leadership of the ICFTU in Asia who work under the umbrella of the ICFTU's Asia Pacific Regional Organization, (APRO) are currently pushing for the affiliation of this "union" federation whose major role is monitoring and securing the interrogation of worker leaders who try to organise and represent workers.

The ICFTU's International Executive Committee is considering a request for affiliation by SPSI that is being supported by APRO. The outcome is far from certain, since the militarized structure and role of SPSI in Indonesia would make even the soul of even the lost bureaucratic union leader squirm. However, the fact that the ICFTU leadership in Asia could even contemplate affiliation of such an organization speaks volumes on the present orientation and character of the ICFTU in Asia.

### **Organisation of the ICFTU in Asia**

APRO is largely funded by the Japanese. Many argue that there are two basic reasons why APRO is so passive in the defense of worker rights in Asia: first and foremost, the official unions that are represented in APRO are agents of worker control; secondly, Japanese corporations which play a major role in Asian economies are none too keen to see independent unionism developing. APRO is seen to be unrepresentative of the newly emerging democratic unions in Asia and is therefore not in the vanguard of the tough fight

for worker rights and democracy. To our knowledge, APRO has hardly said a word about the Export Processing Zones now proliferating throughout Asia, never mind organising and co-ordinating serious campaigns against the denial of union rights within these zones. As a consequence, the ICFTU finds itself on the wrong side of the fence in Asia and has thereby restricted its role in actively challenging dictatorships that are now promoting the severest forms of labour exploitation.

Workers engaged in a hard, often violent struggle for democracy in South Africa may well ask, "What do all of these details have to do with us? So what if the ICFTU through APRO is ineffectual in Asia. No organization is ever perfect. We have our own troubles. We can sympathize with the plight of Asian workers, but they are distant. Asia is on the other side of the globe. There is little that we can do from South Africa, so we should simply get on with our own struggle at this stage".

### **The significance of Asian workers' struggles for the liberation of South African workers**

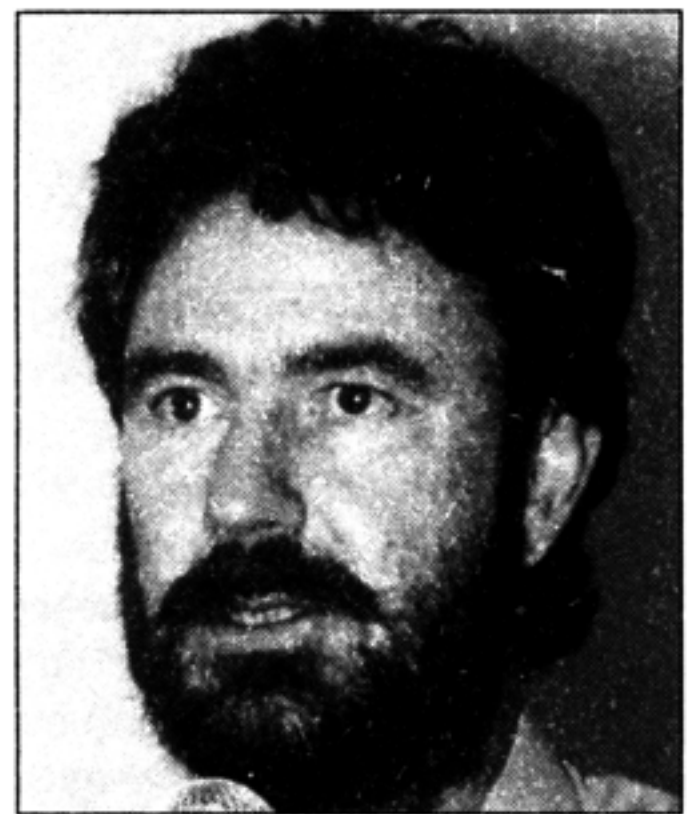
We all live in a borderless global economy, where the new communications technologies and transport systems have facilitated an extremely high degree of capital mobility that cuts through national boundaries and reduces the capacities of individual governments to determine their own national economic policies. Under such conditions, the absence of worker rights in certain countries and regions is undermining the hard fought for rights in the democracies. In this regard, Enzo Friso and Bob White are absolutely correct in their analysis.

The fact that the Asian region has become the centre of gravity of the global economy is no accident. The absence of worker rights in labour surplus economies, structured around Export Processing Zones, controlled by elite regimes, has attracted high levels of multi-national investment across a range of key industrial and mining sectors. Why invest in North America, Europe, South Africa,

Australia, when these investment conditions exist in Asia. The figures tell the story.

Asia is the fastest growing region in the world. Having doubled the regions share of the world's GDP to more than 25% in the past two decades, the region is now set to nearly double that share again to 45% within the next 40 years on present trends. Whilst the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lowered its forecast of world economic growth in 1993 from 3,1% to 2,3%, the Asia Development Bank predicts average growth of more than triple that figure – 7,3% – among its 25 developing member nations.

China, which grew by 12% in 1992, is targeting 9% this year. Malaysia has a growth target of 8% for the sixth consecutive year. Vietnam is predicting 7% growth, whilst Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand and



*Rob Meecham, contributor*

Indonesia should see gross domestic product gains of between 5% and 7%. Japanese Prime Minister, Miyazawa, has hailed Asia "the world's brightest spot for the next century".

In contrast to Asia, the democracies of the developed industrial societies are struggling with the social effects of the other dimension of Asian industrial development, namely, the relocation of production and the consequent changing terms of trade. As Friso points out, the industrialized countries have lost \$72 billion per year in exports over the past 5 years. Two million jobs have been lost.

In the United States, for example, the relocation of production by large transnational corporations into the cheap labour and tax havens of the newly industrializing societies



*(From left): Chris Dlamini and Jay Naidoo of COSATU, Enzo Friso and Bob White from the ICFTU: Friso and White need the support of a strong well-defined COSATU position*

*Photo: William Matlala*

over the past 30 years has reshaped trade by creating high levels of import dependency. Twenty-five percent of United States manufactured goods are now imported compared to only 5% two decades ago. The changing pattern of trade coupled with overseas borrowing has transformed consistent trade surpluses into trade deficits.

Manufacturing in the United States, as a percentage of GNP, has dropped from 30% in 1953 to 21% in 1985, with most of the decline occurring during the 1980s. Between 1979 and 1985, job losses in basic industries were high. In primary metals, employment fell by 457 000; in fabricated metals, 257 000; in non-electrical machinery, 341 000; and in glass products, 111 000.

A situation therefore exists whereby production is being relocated into Asia in a way that creates large scale unemployment, social dislocation and an undermining of labour standards in the developed economies, whilst workers in the newly industrialising societies of Asia are being highly exploited in terms of low wages, hours of work, the lack of

adequate health and safety conditions, and absence of trade union rights.

These changed patterns of capital flows are of great significance for South African workers as the country moves towards political transition. Already the captains of industry are warning that in the new South Africa, the manufacturing sector will have to become competitive by world standards. Thus, for example, the government's Normative Economic Model (NEM) blames high labour costs and low worker productivity for reduced international competitiveness and unemployment in South Africa yet the social and political determinants of international competitiveness are conveniently not spelt out.

Competing with Asian countries on their terms would require a steady reversal of the gains that South African workers have won over the past two decades. Wages and conditions would have to be eroded; massive tax holidays would have to be granted to companies; to these ends the country would have to be carved up into Asian styled Export Processing Zones. Ex-Bantustan leaders may

be called in for advice, seeing that they already have had experience with operationalising the concept. Freedom in South Africa would not be the dawning of a new age of opportunity. In its stead would come an era of economic slavery.

### **An alternative strategy**

Whilst Asian workers may well be weighed down by extreme economic exploitation and political oppression, they are also beginning to organise and resist, just as South African workers did in the early 1970s. Rapid industrialisation is forging a socially significant working class which is gradually claiming its rights. New impulses towards independent unionism are being born everywhere. Even within the extreme repression of Indonesia, workers are organising. Industrial strike action has escalated dramatically since 1990.

COSATU can make a real contribution to the more rapid advancement of these struggles, given the experience of organizing under hostile conditions that has accumulated over the past two decades. For this to happen, *COSATU needs to demand a radical restructuring of the ICFTU's operations in Asia as a precondition to their affiliation.* COSATU should consider requesting the following action on the part of the ICFTU leadership:

- A plan for a complete restructuring of APRO is urgent. The Asian branch of the ICFTU needs to relocate itself within the newly emergent independent unions of Asia. These unions need to be resourced and assisted. To this end a conference of these unions should be called to reach common agreement on the kind of ICFTU regional structure that would most effectively meet the needs of the newly emergent unions.
- The established, state and employer dominated unions should be given the opportunity to reform their structures along democratic and accountable and independent lines. Such reforms should create the opportunity for new relationships between national federations to be forged. Federations that are unwilling to enter such

a reform process within a set time period, should be expelled from the ICFTU as suggested by Bob White.

- The new regional structure should adopt a high profile with international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. A social code of conduct based on ILO and UN rights should be applied to multi-national companies investing in the region. Free trade should be transformed into fair trade, that is, trade linked to worker rights. The human and worker rights abuses of authoritarian regimes should be ruthlessly exposed. Above all else, the Export Processing Zone concept should be attacked day in and day out and exposed for what it is: the denial of all rights by the state in the interests of capital.

If COSATU affiliates to the ICFTU without bargaining and negotiating the issue of the character of the ICFTU in Asia, an historic opportunity will have been lost. The pressure for an organizational transformation of the ICFTU in Asia will be dramatically reduced because the ICFTU will be able to gain enormous credibility from COSATU's affiliation, *without having to transform its Asian operations.* Voiceless Asian workers will be on their own, against great odds. Investment will continue to flow into Asia at very high rates. New jobs will be created under slave like conditions, whilst workers in North America, Europe, South African and Australia slowly slide down the slippery slope of conceding conditions, won after blood, sweat and tears had been spilt.

Bondage in a region fast moving towards being the centre of gravity of economic activity will slowly and insidiously enslave all workers. The COSATU leadership has a magnificent opportunity, through the strength, power and moral force of decades of effective organising work, to redefine unionism in Asia in the coming decades. Leaders such as Enzo Friso and Bob White need the support of a strong, defined COSATU position if they are to translate their fresh viewpoints into organisational practice in Asia. ☆



# The ICFTU in SA: *admissions, revelations, silences*

It is evident from the size of the delegation, and the interviews themselves, that the ICFTU is wooing the South African unions. It is just as evident that COSATU needs the support of the ICFTU, or at least its major 'First World' members (von Holdt 1993, MacShane 1993). Now, extensive

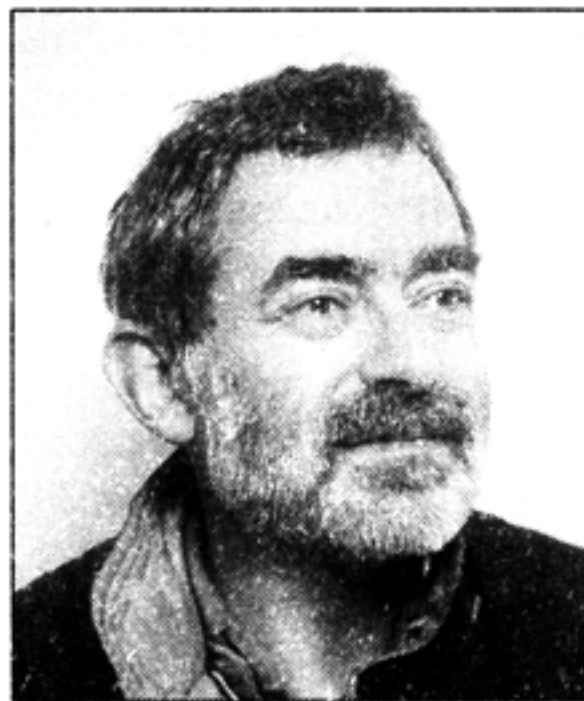
information and ideas about COSATU, other South African unions, their history and policies, is available to the ICFTU. But the opposite is not necessarily the case. So it may be well worthwhile looking critically at the admissions, revelations and silences in these interviews.

## Admissions

This is the first time, in the 20 or more years I have been following ICFTU development, that I have ever seen an admission by an

ICFTU General Secretary that union financial assistance has gone into the pockets of dictators – or even supported dictatorships more generally – in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Or that it has hardly challenged the

It is not so long ago that the only affiliates of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in South Africa were white racist unions supporting the apartheid regime (Webster 1984). And that non-racial unions and their supporters were castigating the ICFTU and its major affiliates for 'trade-union imperialism' (Thomson and Larson 1978). The LABOUR BULLETIN interviews of ICFTU delegates, in 'The ICFTU in South Africa' (Vol 17 No 1, Jan-Feb 1993, 67-71), provide fascinating insights into both the changes and the continuities in that organisation.



by Peter Waterman\*

\* Peter Waterman, of the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, Netherlands, is currently completing a book entitled 'From Labour Internationalism to Global Solidarity'.

World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Or that criticism of its past association with undemocratic unions in the South is legitimate.

Such admissions are not made in *FREE LABOUR WORLD*, the ICFTU monthly, where all that the ICFTU General Secretary says is that the ICFTU has 'throughout its history' supported democratic independent unionism (FLW, January 1993).

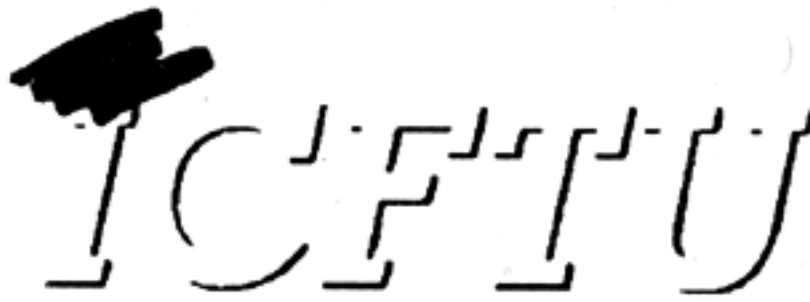
Perhaps the *BULLETIN* asks more pressing questions than does FLW. Perhaps the ICFTU is more interested in persuading the South African unions that it is turning a new leaf than its own members!

### Revelations

According to ICFTU General Secretary, Enzo Friso, COSATU is welcome to try and make the ICFTU 'more progressive'. The interviews suggest that there is more than enough room for this.

The three interviewees seem to share traditional Western liberal-reformist ideas about the economy, the state, the nation, development and human rights. There are, of course, worse international strategies than reformist liberalism – for example, the current neo-liberal destruction of jobs, welfare, social and union rights worldwide. But, given the impotence of liberal and even social-democratic reformism in the face of neo-liberalism, doesn't this framework require criticism, revision or replacement also?

'Development' for the ICFTU clearly means the development of capitalism, both nationally and internationally. The ICFTU spokesmen (no women!) also seem to have continuing faith in 1) the capacity of the nation-state to develop and protect national economies, 2) state willingness to help trade unions have access to the World Bank and IMF, and 3) the willingness of these inter-state institutions to meet worker needs. Such attitudes, seem more appropriate to the social-reformist Keynesian 1940s than the anti-social Thatcherite 1990s.



The failure of nation-states as developers/controllers of economies has been signalled by such developments as that of

the North American Free Trade Area (Canada, USA, Mexico – with Chile next?). This is talked of at length by the ICFTU interviewees, but they provide no ground for their expectation that the anti-union and anti-worker regimes of these three countries have any interest in helping unions bring pressure on the World Bank and IMF. Rather than trying to restore a past phase of capitalist development, shouldn't the world trade-union movement be deciding how to fight in the new one?

It's only five or ten years since US workers were venting their frustration at the loss of jobs by 'Toyota Bashing' – ritualistic public displays of anger at cheap, high quality, economic cars, imported from Japan. The globalisation of capital, paradoxically, is helping to liberate such workers from the illusion that they can rely on symbolic expressions of anger, on their employers or the nation-state to defend them from international movements of finance, production and labour. Globalisation is also helping to stimulate unions to surpass protectionist strategies that ally them with local capitalists and nationalist politicians who may actually be anti-labour. This is happening within NAFTA – with US, Canadian and Mexican (opposition) unions, workers, communities, women, ecologists and human-rights activists talking and working energetically together for almost the first time in living memory.

What would seem to be called for in the rising number of capitalist-promoted free-trade areas are some kind of labour, democratic and ecologically-friendly development plans for the regions concerned, and for the world – something not even hinted at in the ICFTU statements.

### Silences

Reading these interviews one could get the impression that the ICFTU was the expression of a growing number of the world's workers, enjoying the enthusiastic support of its member

unions, and devoted to international labour solidarity. It is actually something much more problematic (MacShane 1993). And this should be a matter of concern to all workers and unionists, whether inside the ICFTU or not. It should, indeed, be a matter of concern for all internationalists, even if they are not unionists or workers.

ICFTU-affiliated unions apparently support it, on average, with but one percent of their funds, keeping the rest for national purposes (such as persuading US consumers to 'Buy American'). Contrast this with Amnesty International, of which the Dutch affiliate pays 38.6 percent to the international office.

The ICFTU cannot even begin to compare its financial resources with the 'new social movement internationals'. It receives from the affiliation fees of its 113 million members only some GB£7m a year. The ecological international, Greenpeace, receives from its 4.3m members some £110m! Amnesty International receives from its one million or so members and donors, some £12m per year. We seem to have revealed here the difference between an organisation and a movement.

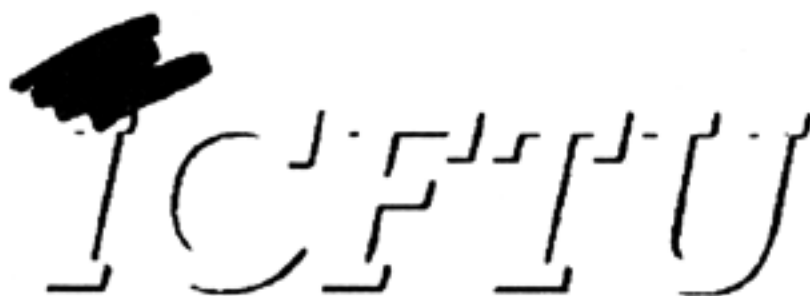
Thirdly, both the ICFTU and its major Western members have long been highly dependent, for their Third World activities, on capitalist state development-funding (Wedin 1974) – itself a highly-ambiguous activity. Some years ago the ICFTU was dependent on such funding for some 40 percent of its total income – thus acting as yet another 'channel' for top-down state development funding. Amnesty, on the other hand, has a principle of not accepting state subsidies. Unions and workers don't pay for most of this Third World activity and therefore don't care much about what it is used for (which is why, presumably, it could be channelled to corrupt unions and repressive dictatorships). This activity can be called 'international working-class solidarity' only by stretching this term into meaninglessness.

### **Implications**

So what is the ICFTU? I think it would be not unfair or inaccurate to characterise it as a Western-based and Western-dominated

international organisation of trade-union leaderships, most of these believing in the desirability or inevitability of the market system, being nationalist rather than internationalist, state-oriented or state-dependent, seeking to moderate or reform the worst economic and political excesses of the world capitalist system, and hoping to do so primarily by lobbying state or inter-state organs.

But the ICFTU is changing – sometimes in ways not indicated in the interviews. In the first place, it is growing dramatically in terms of affiliates and individual members, all of these from the ex-Communist or Third Worlds. In the second place it is taking a growing interest in human rights activities and 'PeaceWork' – conversion from military



production (FLW May 1993). In the third place, its leaders have, as the Friso interview suggests, been increasingly prepared to put their bodies on the line as well as in the lobby.

So the shortcomings do not at all mean that COSATU should avoid relations with the ICFTU, or even joining it (Waterman 1992). Any more than a post-apartheid South Africa should avoid joining a United Nations dominated by the US and the West (and that intervenes energetically in the Third World but seems incapable of doing so in Europe). On the contrary. The presence within the ICFTU of young, new, mass-mobilising unions, linked with wider social movements in their societies, having some new kind of socialist ideologies or aspirations, might renew the organisation. They might also remind it of its origins in a 19th century emancipatory tradition of militant labour internationalism. They might help make it a worthy partner for the new social movement internationals. And they might, finally, help it develop convincing and attractive alternatives to the New/Old World Order of an aggressive and destructive global capitalism. ☆



# Occupational Health *and* Safety Act

**A** new law to regulate health and safety in the workplace is to be debated in parliament in June. The Occupational Health and Safety Act will replace the current safety law, the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act (MOSA). It is expected to become law either late this year or at the beginning of next year. The most important changes it will introduce are procedures for the election of health and safety representatives.

MOSA gives management the right to appoint safety representatives. This was heavily criticised by the unions and after many years the government has responded by requiring the election of health and safety representatives. The representatives have extensive rights and powers and the union movement will have to debate and develop strategies to enable it to take the maximum advantage of these changes to the law.

The new Act, like MOSA,



*by Paul Benjamin of the  
Centre for Applied Legal  
Studies (CALs)*

will apply to all workers in South Africa except those in the mining and fishing industries. Safety in the mining industry is regulated by the Minerals Act and the government recently approved the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into occupational health and safety on the mines. The fishing industry will be regulated by special regulations made in terms of the Merchant Shipping Act.

## **Election of health and safety representatives**

Every business employing more than 20 workers will have to have representatives. In shops and offices there must be at least one representative for every 100 workers. In all other workplaces, such as factories and building sites, there must be one representative for every 50 workers. In addition, an inspector can require a workplace to have a higher number of safety representatives.

The law states that an employer must *consult in good faith* with its employees or their representatives about the arrangements and procedures for the nomination or election of representatives. This means that an employer must meet with its workers or their trade unions to try to agree upon a process for electing health and safety representatives. These talks must be held with representatives of the entire workforce. Agreement should

## LEGAL NOTES

be reached on issues such as the constituencies for the election of health and safety representatives, the practical arrangements for an election and how often elections should be held.

If this consultation does not lead to agreement between the employer and the workers, the unresolved issues must be referred to an inspector for arbitration. The decision of the inspector may be taken on appeal to the chief inspector and the Industrial Court. However, the Act prohibits a trade union or a group of workers from taking up a dispute over the elections in terms of the Labour Relations Act and staging a strike. The employer and trade union may also agree that the dispute be referred to an arbitrator other than an inspector.

Unions will have to be very careful as to the procedures that are agreed upon for the election of health and safety representatives. The Act does not give a specific role to unions and many employers will try to use this procedure to reduce the influence of trade unions over health and safety matters. The Act allows employers and workers to agree that no elections should be held and that the safety representatives should be nominated. In factories where unions are particularly strong, this could be used to reach an agreement that the elected shopstewards will be nominated as the safety

representatives.

Only full-time employees can be health and safety representatives. They must also be acquainted with the conditions and activities at their workplace. Again, this is likely to lead to disputes as employers may try to exclude key union officials from being representatives by saying they don't have knowledge of the conditions and activities at their workplace. Disputes about this will also be referred to an inspector to resolve.

### Functions and powers

Health and safety representatives are elected for a particular section of a workplace and they perform all their functions in that section of their workplace (in small plants a single representative will be responsible for the whole place). The most important functions of a representative are to:

- review the effectiveness of health and safety measures;
- identify potential hazards and potential major incidents at the workplace;
- in collaboration with the employer, examine the causes of incidents that pose a threat to health and safety and accidents at the workplace;
- investigate complaints by employees relating to health or safety at work;
- make representations to the employer or a health and safety committee or an inspector on any one of

these issues;

- make representations to the employer on any matter affecting the health and safety of employees at work;
- inspect the workplace with a view to the health and safety of workers working there. These inspections must be conducted on a regular basis at an interval agreed upon between the representative and the employer;
- accompany an inspector on any inspection of the workplace and participate in consultations with the inspector at the workplace;
- receive information concerning health and safety from inspectors.

Health and safety representatives have the right to:

- visit the site of any accident or any other incident that could affect health and safety and conduct an inspection of the site;
- attend any investigation or formal inquiry held in terms of the Act;
- inspect any document which the employer is required to keep in terms of the Act;
- accompany an inspector on any inspection;
- be accompanied by a technical advisor on any inspection;
- participate in any internal health or safety audit that the company conducts.

These are a very extensive series of rights that go beyond the rights of representatives

under MOSA. In addition, the employer must provide health and safety representatives with the facilities, assistance and training that they require to carry out their functions. Training is definitely the most important aspect and trade unions will have to ensure that training for elected health and safety representatives is adequate and appropriate. All time spent by a safety representative carrying out their functions as well as receiving training is regarded as ordinary working time and they are entitled to payment.

The right of health and safety representatives to accompany inspectors on inspections is new. Where the employer has been informed by the inspector that an inspection will take place, the health and safety representatives concerned must be told. The employer must inform health and safety representatives of any inspection and investigation as well as any application it makes for an exemption from the Act or regulations. In addition, health and safety representatives must be informed as soon as possible about an accident or any other incident that endangered or could endanger the health or safety of workers. The representative for the area in which the incident or accident occurred must be informed.

### **Health and safety committee**

Every workplace with two or more health and safety representatives must have a

health and safety committee. The committee consists of the representatives and persons representing the employer. The employer may not have more representatives than there are health and safety representatives.

The committee can consult over all aspects of worker health and safety. This includes the initiation or development of new health and safety measures as well as maintaining and reviewing current measures. The health and safety committee must meet at least once every three months. A large employer may have more than one committee.

The committee may make recommendations about matters of health and safety to the employer and, where these are not implemented, to an inspector. In addition it may discuss any incident in which a person was either injured, became ill or died.

### **Other changes to the law**

The new Act covers occupational health. MOSA's coverage of occupational health is limited to a few very dangerous substances such as lead and asbestos. Now the chief inspector can draw up a list of hazardous substances. Any business that uses these hazardous substances will have to avoid or minimise the exposure of employees to the substances.

Where employees work with these substances, the employer must implement an occupational hygiene

programme as well as biological monitoring and medical surveillance. This requires regular medical testing of the employees to ensure that their exposure to the substance does not endanger their health.

The Advisory Council for Occupational Safety remains in effect and its power will be extended to occupational health. The council has 20 members of whom six represent workers' interests. Like other labour market institutions, it advises the Minister on all policy matters related to occupational health and safety.

The Council plays an important role in developing safety standards, making regulations and promoting education and training in occupational health and safety. Previously, none of the major trade union federations has been represented on this Council and COSATU and the other federations will have to consider whether to devote resources to participation in these structures.

### **Conclusion**

The Occupational Health and Safety Bill is in general a progressive reform of the law. But it will not alone improve working conditions for South Africa's workers.

Organisational strategies will be required to take maximum advantage of the legal changes and translate them into real gains. ☆

# Is there harmony at Harmony?

National Union of Mineworkers

(NUM) shopsteward JOSEPH

LETSOTA tells SNUKI ZIKALALA

about problems workers at

Harmony gold mine face in

relation to profit sharing,

performance bonuses and

Sunday blasting.

**H**armony gold mine is one of the marginalised mines. Last year, the company retrenched 6 000 workers and, because of downscaling, a number of workers are likely to lose their jobs.

Because of the price of gold and downscaling, we have agreed with our union, NUM, to a low wage increase. As a shopsteward, I found it very difficult to persuade workers to accept this proposal. Management showed us the books and we were faced with one option - retrenchment - or the closure of the mine.

Our task as shopstewards

was to persuade workers to accept the low wage increment. We also had to convince workers the only way to supplement the low wage increase and secure jobs was to accept the profit-sharing scheme, productivity bonus and Sunday blasting.

### **Workers want a fat wage package**

As shopstewards we have an enormous task educating workers about these concepts. What workers want to see at the end of the month is a fat wage package.

It is not only workers from

Harmony who are battling to understand these concepts. At our last NUM Central Committee (CC) meeting we had to convince a number of comrades from our region and mines about these schemes. There is still a lot of ground work to be covered. Workers are still suspicious of management.

As a new scheme, profit sharing has teething problems. In principle, Harmony agreed with us that the first R1 million would be split equally among all the workers. We agreed the balance of the distributable amount would be divided

among the workers in the proportions that their individual basic salaries have to the company's total profit.

Workers do not really understand all this. The situation becomes tense when the company does not make profits. Workers stop



production and demand a meeting and an explanation as to why there were no profits for a particular month.

There have been a number of work stoppages, but as shopstewards we managed to explain these intricacies to the workers. You must understand you are dealing with workers who do not want theoretical explanations, but practical results in terms of hard-earned wage increments for their work.

Workers still feel the mining company is not sincere. These are old attitudes which derive from management's past insincerity. It is still difficult

for workers to trust them. More education on both sides is needed, and the employers will have to build the trust that has been lost.

Workers thought they would regain, through profit sharing, the ground they had lost. Yet those who earn more or who are skilled are winning that ground.

White workers, the majority of whom are classified miners, ie they have blasting certificates, are gaining a lot from these schemes. The other advantage white miners have is that they are the ones who are highly paid. These schemes add a lot more money into their coffers.

### **Performance bonus scheme**

Workers are questioning the manner in which management is measuring the performance bonus scheme. In principle, this is based on our meeting the targets so as to improve on the cost per kilogram of gold produced. We are still very confused as to how the employers are measuring it.

It becomes easier if there are only seven workers in a gang. Then the bonus is larger. This confuses workers. They think the more of them there are in a gang and the faster they work in terms of drilling and clearing the stopes, the more money they will get. But it is not like that. Our production bonus is measured by total face advance divided by metre squared per man.

This infuriates workers. It

will take time for us to get used to this mechanism.

### **White workers gain from our bargaining strategies**

White miners earn a lot from profit sharing, performance bonus and the Sunday blasting.

Sunday blasting means that mines are now operating on a seven-day cycle. In principle workers are opposed to this but due to the present circumstances – the saving of Harmony and jobs – we have agreed to work on Sundays. It is voluntary and this is not a permanent agreement. When the mine recovers, we hope, we will return to our normal shifts.

What really annoys us is that unions and associations representing white miners are "opposed" to Sunday blasting, and yet their members are the first ones on the mines as volunteers. They also get an incentive for working on Sundays.

White workers must not always benefit from our hard-won victories. They must involve themselves in decision making or pay an agency fee to NUM.

Downscaling will affect not only African workers, but the entire community of Virginia – the town near Harmony – and this will have adverse effects.

We believe it is only through our collective efforts and education that we can improve and save whatever we can. ☆



## A PLACE IN THE CITY – The Rand on the eve of Apartheid

by Luli Callinicos, (*Ravan, Johannesburg*)

*Reviewed by Langa Zita\**

**A**t a Fordsburg ANC branch premiere of Spike Lee's movie "Malcolm X", the chairperson of the branch, an African, introduced three leading members of the democratic movement from the Indian community, including the SACP's Essop Pahad.

Common prejudice defines the Indian community as conservative, yet here was an audience, represented by both young and old, who were listening attentively to a communist, Essop Pahad, as he related stories about his life and his experiences with the recently assassinated Chris Hani and the late OR Tambo. Callinicos's book, *A PLACE IN THE CITY*, did much to understand this.

The book is about a particular moment, the decade of the forties, how that decade was experienced by ordinary working class South Africans and how their struggles and defeats gave rise to the apartheid state. Gleaned from the lives of six working class South Africans, it gives a picture of how the process of industrialisation emerged and how people responded to it.

### **The stories**

Martha Masina, daughter of a labour tenant, was twenty-one years old when she left her share cropper family in Middelburg to go to Johannesburg in 1939. Hers was an escape from the despotism of Oom Piet on whose farm the family stayed and to whom they had to offer six months of unpaid labour in return for accommodation. Masina was destined to

spend 50 years in the back yards of the world of madams.

Hendrik Hoffman arrived in Johannesburg from the Orange Free State at a time when the "once huge tracts of land owned by the Boers in the nineteenth century were shrinking steadily as the farms were divided up to provide for each generation of sons". Drought and the depression of the early 30s was the culprit that forced him to leave his beloved home. As a white worker, Hoffman experienced both the deprivations of his class and the protective shell of racism.

For teenager Naboth Mokgathle, it was not only economic dictates that forced him to leave his village of Phokeng in Rustenburg, but also adventure and the predominant myths and legends about the world of the proletariat. He made use of his 15-day permit to find a job in Pretoria and later, found himself drawn to the many struggles of this era as a trade unionist and a Communist Party member in Pretoria.

Life for Ama Naidoo, wife of activist Naran Naidoo, meant reconciling her activities as housewife to a number of economic activities to make ends meet. Through her we are able to see, not only her adaptation to a challenging environment, but also the activism of her husband who was able to develop a community consciousness in his area whilst playing a leading role in his union, in the Transvaal Indian Congress as well as in the Communist Party. The Fordsburg premiere was, to me, part of this radical thread, whose steadfastness undermined the tricameral sellout.

There is also the story of Katerina le Roux,

\* NUMSA Information and Media Officer

displaced from the platteland. Le Roux joins the Garment Workers' Union, which was ably led by communist Solly Sachs. She initially admires Sachs's leadership qualities, but with promotion and the perks of a white labour aristocracy, increasingly finds his politics uncomfortable.

Finally, there is the story of Seketi Molewa from Sekhukhuneland, who fails to embrace the urban world, is alienated from it and consistently maintains a rural outlook and remains a migrant worker throughout his life.

Through the chronicle of these workers' lives, one is able to discern the slow yet definite development of political struggle against the bosses and the state by the black protagonists, whilst a contradictory process of struggle and co-option characterises the white working class's response to the class question.

### The struggles

Against the background of the individual stories, *A PLACE IN THE CITY* describes and analyses the events that were shaping the country at the time.

White South Africa, in both its liberal and racist wings, found it convenient and profitable to consider Africans as "temporary sojourners" in the cities, and subsequently took no heed of their needs as urban communities. The result was the emergence of a number of bread and butter struggles, mainly over transport and housing.

The Sofasonke Party of James Mpanza was

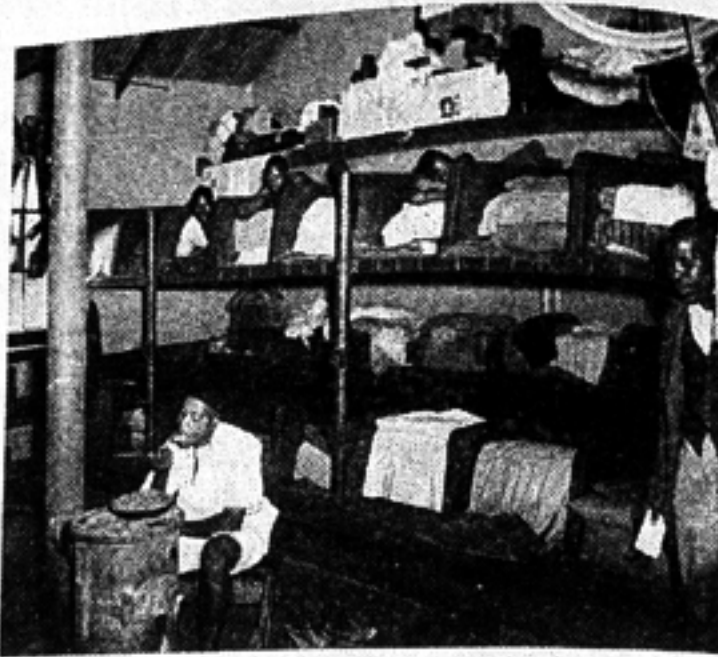
the most illustrious of a general movement of illegal settlements that grew overnight around Johannesburg. Mpanza was a populist and able orator, the only non-communist member of the Orlando Advisory Board, whose "call to a landless people struck a deep seated feeling and

attracted a devout following in the 20 000 people who heeded his call". Whilst the ANC was able to detect the potential of the movement, the same cannot be said for the Communist Party of South Africa CPSA which moved from suspicion of the Sofasonke movement to outright maltreatment of Mpanza. However, this episode appears to have been a dark cloud in a silver period for the party, which was at the centre of almost all the struggles that

were unfolding at this time. Two struggles highlight the CPSA's role: the Alexandra Bus Boycott and the school boycott in support of party activist David Bopape.

Alex was one of the most 'liberal' places on the Rand, being a black freehold area, and, according to Mrs S "a very good place for poor people". A number of attempts by the government were made to threaten and intimidate Alex residents. It was, however, the two penny hike in bus fares that catapulted the community into a struggle with the black and white (majority) bus owners. The struggle, a boycott against the bus companies, was led by a local CPSA leader, Gaur Radebe (also ANC Transvaal leader) and was able, after a protracted period of four years, to force the





This is a photograph of a mine compound probably built in the 1930s. The man sitting on the stool is a miner who is sitting on the ground, the wooden stool is the wooden stool used by the miner for sitting and the wooden stool for sitting on. The man sitting on the stool is a miner who is sitting on the ground, the wooden stool is the wooden stool used by the miner for sitting and the wooden stool for sitting on.

Patterns of Poldi migrancy went back almost a hundred years. In the 1850s, youths from Sekhukhuleni fled to farms and towns in the eastern Cape to find work. Later, it became a custom to travel to Kimberley to earn money for pass, which they used to defend their land, and for hunting. Money, therefore, was by no means new to Poldi society.

Although Seketi was not attracted to Western culture, he was interested in what money could buy. In more recent times, instant food, manufactured household goods and farming implements could be bought at stores; things that more and more households needed as the land economy declined. For Seketi, as a young rural teenager, money could buy clothes, and a new image of himself.

*I was a young boy, I was scared by staff, but not by them. I had to put on trousers. [Before,] I was wearing traditional clothes - lekgotane.*

At the Marble Hall farms he lived in a compound, making the cows of a man who worked at the mine. Seketi also worked as a domestic, serving in the kitchen. This was a common practice amongst Poldi youth as a stepping stone to better paid jobs. Seketi



A 'white boy' (1915) is surrounded by the tools of his trade, the furniture and the many objects he is expected to keep polished and clean. In the 1930s and 1940s, many tended to consider women as domestic workers. At the time Seketi's own domestic service was a way of learning the ways and languages of the whites for those who had not been directly exposed to western culture at home. If they were lucky, migrants could then get a post which allowed them to move on to a higher paid job or a labourer at the mine.

worked there for a year, earning ten shillings a month, ... on leave or holidays. We were living in miserable conditions, sleeping in a shabby place. The end came when one day he was caught using a spoon which belonged to my boss. I was arrested and sent to police station. The sentence was six lashes.

Seketi then left Marble Hall and went to work as a farm labourer, planting sorghum and peanuts. Life there too was difficult, but his pay had improved to £1.10s. His next move was to industrial employment as a miner. Since the days of Kimberley, mining was another traditional occupation for Poldi migrants. Seketi's job involved heavy labour, but the wages were higher than the pay for farm workers. Looking for more skilled work, he managed to find a job at Phoenix Mine in Witbank; here he operated a machine, crushing and loading coal. Although the work and pay were highly exploitative, Seketi took pride in his work. It was almost as if the challenge of difficult and hard work was another initiation test.

*I was breaking big coals. It was a better job. I was making some home which were left behind... I was earning £1.10s but £0.50s I found myself a man.*

As a wage earner, Seketi was able to contribute to the household, both in cash and kind. His early experience on the farms had equipped him with a knowledge of Afrikaners which proved useful in finding the mining job.

Seketi recalls that the compound at the mine was better than the farm compounds. He does not remember strikes or clashes during his time there. The farm for Seketi his workplace was just that - a place where he worked, of small social importance. Although he remained with the mine for several years, he always returned home to help in the ploughing seasons and in the affairs of the community. As he grew up, Seketi put his energies into improving conditions at home.

For workers like Seketi, transition to city life was gradual. During most of the 1940s, he avoided the Rand. But he needed money

companies to lower the fares and the city council to subsidise them.

Bopape came to Brakpan as a teacher from the north and immediately immersed himself in the daily concerns of the community, joining the CPSA in 1940 and becoming a leader of the Brakpan Residents' Association. His prestige was seen as a threat by the Brakpan Council, which sacked him. The act angered the community so much that parents called for a school boycott and marched to have the decision changed, to no avail.

The advisory boards of the time were the only political outlet for the disenfranchised urban Africans, as they had some measure of control over the delivery of services. It is interesting to note that while these bodies were designed for co-option, they were used effectively as channels of struggle by the communists. It is also testimony to the effectiveness of the CPSA at this time that it was the major force on all the boards throughout the country. This was a tactic that had its critics, especially from sections of the Trotskyite movement who saw it as

collaboration.

The decade was also characterised by changes in the ideology of the ANC, as the movement's politics moved towards Africanism and later towards radical non-racialism and a militant political practice spearheaded by the ANC Youth League. High points of this era are well-known.

The CPSA was also a co-author of this process. Guided by the Kotane slogan, "nationalist in form socialist in content", the party, according Elias Motsoaledi, "encouraged us to join the national liberatory movement to give it a progressive outlook and lead it-to make it the mass movement it supposed to be". It remains to be seen to what extent is the socialist content of the national movement is being contested today?

On the shopfloor, a number of unrecognised black unions emerged at this time, with the majority of unions under CNETU, and together registering the highest number of members since the days of the ICU. Several factors facilitated this development. Employment space was



created by the participation of white workers in the war. A war economy needed a relatively stable work force and some semiskilled jobs were taken up by African workers. The special conditions of the period and the role played by the Soviet Union in the war, saw some accommodation between the ruling class and the CPSA. On a number of occasions Gana Makabeni, a CPSA trade unionist, was called upon to mediate some of the spontaneous strikes that were rampant at the time. These special conditions helped to raise the wages of the black workers. It is also interesting to note that as a result of these developments, two commissions even recommended the extension of worker rights to African workers.

The situation of white (Afrikaner) workers was different. Having benefitted from the welfarism of the Pact government of Hertzog in the 1920s and beyond, they were already en route towards becoming a racist labour aristocracy highly insulated by the state and by craft protection from the rigours of the market. Spurred on by neo-Nazi organisations such as the Ossewa Brandwag and the Nationalist Party, the white working class threw its weight behind the racist agenda that led to the victory of the Nationalist Party.

Callinicos describes how what little was left of class solidarity across the colour line at the time was seriously undermined, partly as a result of the advances made by the black working class and the discrimination endured by the Afrikaners (for their general opposition to the war).

### Simple and impressive

Callinicos's book is written in the simple and accessible style that has become her trademark. This impressive book successfully captures the mosaic of the process of proletarianisation in South Africa, as it reflects on themes of utmost and present relevance.

She ably shows that the racial divisions in the working class are not insurmountable and that, at certain moments, white garment workers were willing to defend their black sisters (even if with paternalistic undertones and with little endurance) – something we can build upon

today.

The book also covers a period that can, in all fairness, be described as the highest point in the history of the Communist Party, indicating the potential that exists for the party in these open times. Communists in the 40s were everywhere: in bus boycotts, in massacres, and in trade unions. They were, without doubt, the epicentre and leading force of the popular struggles of this period.

Callinicos must also be congratulated for her consistency, and the continuity of this book with her previous works. The same cannot be said of her peers in other fields of study – such as economics, a field in which so many have eaten their words. One would hope that in her case, it is an assertion that earlier questions (and their answers) are still-unresolved structural apartheid and her twin sister capitalism will outlive Codesa.

### Two issues

There are however two points that I would like to take issue with. Recently, socialist Baruch Hirson's book "Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930-1947" (1991) highlighted the important role played by Max Gordon (a Trotskyite) in rebuilding the African trade unions in the 40s. A greater assertion and discussion of his role could have been useful in the light of the prominence (justified as it is) given to the CPSA leadership of this time.

Secondly, there is some debate about the strength of the black working class in this period. For example, Fine and Davis in "Beyond Apartheid – Labour and Liberation in South Africa" (1991) argue that the weakness, rather than the strength, of this class was the main condition for the rise of apartheid. Callinicos's view on both these questions would have been very useful.

A PLACE IN THE CITY will occupy a place on the reading lists of all those interested in and all who are part of the South African working class movement. It should be prescribed reading in all the structures of the democratic movement. ☆

Interviewed by  
Snuki Zikalala

# **Tommy Oliphant** *general secretary of the Metal and Electrical Workers Union of SA*

**W**e look forward to a merger of the two federations. But this merger must first come from below, from workers at the shopfloor. We are also looking at possible mergers with NUMSA. A number of meetings have been held and the deadlock has been over NUMSA's alliance with the ANC/SACP.

Though we are first looking at possible mergers within NACTU, there are serious problems. The coming congress of MEWUSA in June will decide whether to continue with possible mergers within NACTU or whether to merge with NUMSA.

In these days of economic depression and high unemployment, we need a very strong union. Getting all the metal unions together will be a breakthrough in worker unity.

## **Early life**

I was born in Payneville, in Springs, on 16 April 1945. This was a mixed working class area, with coloureds, Indians and Africans living together. I come from a poor working class family. My father was a driver and my mother a domestic worker.

I wrote matric at William Hills High School in Benoni. During my school days I was the secretary of our football club and the Payneville youth group.

After leaving school in 1966, I was employed as a clerk at Grosvenor Ford. It was a boring job, since I was dealing with car parts and not with people. I left the company in 1968

and joined the Department of Manpower. Here I became directly involved with problems of the working class. I helped workers who were unemployed or had been dismissed without valid reason.

## **Joining the union**

In June 1969, I responded to an advert in the Springs newspaper for an organiser for the Electrical and Allied Trade Union (EATU). This union organising coloured artisans in the Cape was opening up branches in the

Transvaal. EATU was administered by the South African Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA), a white union. [See the interview with Ben Nicholson of SAEWA in the last issue of LABOUR BULLETIN - ed].

Being an organiser for EATU wasn't child's play. Management in the Transvaal was then opposed to Africans joining trade unions. Only white workers were legally protected by their unions.

I had very frustrating experiences. It was difficult to organise workers at plant level or to arrange a meeting with management. Management always intimidated workers and threatened them with dismissal if they joined the union.

With perseverance and determination we made some breakthroughs. In the 70s we managed to get to the negotiation table with management and were allowed to sit in the Industrial Council meetings. We negotiated for

**"We were not allowed full participation at the Industrial Council. As a parallel union to the South African Electrical Workers Association (SAEWA), we were represented by SAEWA white general secretary. Independence from SAEWA opened doors for us. We now hold joint rallies with COSATU and NACTU affiliates."**

recognition agreements. At the time I was organising coloured and Indian workers only.

Black workers were represented by a member of Bantu Affairs. Black workers had no direct contact with nor did they know the person supposedly representing them in the Industrial Council. It was disgusting.

### **Frustrations and breakaway from SAEWA**

We were not allowed to talk or raise issues at the Industrial Council. As a parallel union to SAEWA, we had no general secretary and were represented by SAEWA's white general secretary.

We had shocking experiences. We had to sit and observe the negotiation process. It was as if we had no brains, no initiative and no sense of responsibility. I hated the idea of being represented by a white person who could not articulate our grievances. The apartheid structures blocked my brains and made me a mummy in those negotiations.

It was worse on the shopfloor. I would enter a factory and organise workers and after I had spoken about the importance of being in a union my last sentence, which I hated uttering, would be: "Only coloureds and Indians are allowed to join this union." It was humiliating. I felt as if I was being used by the apartheid structure.

Proposals for the training of coloured and Indian shopstewards were always rejected by SAEWA's leadership. The mother union was opposed to seminars. They claimed we wouldn't be able to learn anything in the seminars since we only went there to sing and could not grasp the subject matter. As an organiser, I wanted links with other black unions, but always met opposition from SAEWA's leadership. I was told: "You must do this and not that. You must move in this direction and not that. You must take part in this and not that. You must contact this union and not that one." It was a nightmare.

SAEWA's leadership looked at our problems from a different perspective. They lived in towns and worked under different conditions and yet they wanted to tell us how



Photo: William Matlala

we should conduct ourselves. Working conditions and township life are quite different from what is experienced by whites. You cannot have the same solution for two communities who live in two different worlds.

I did a lot of soul searching, asking myself whether it was worth it. Should I continue to humiliate myself? Should I always be represented by a white general secretary who had no understanding of our desires or aspirations? What haunted me most was the racial barrier which made it impossible for me to organise black workers.

In 1978, I formed the Electrical and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (EAWUSA) which organised blacks. EATU and EAWUSA fell under the leadership of the SAEWU, as they were representing different racial groups.

The publication of the 1979 Wiehahn Commission's report, the amendment of the Industrial Conciliation Act and the Labour Relations Act gave us room to manoeuvre. The executives of EATU and EAWUSA proposed

that a non-racial union be formed in this industry.

However, SAEWA's leadership had serious reservations. They appeared to be afraid of being overwhelmed by workers from EATU and EAWUSA. They rejected our proposal and we had to look for other alternatives.

Pressure from the workers and the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) contributed a lot. We were accused of being a parallel union with no voice nor representation.

In 1985 we broke away and formed the Electrical and Allied Workers Trade Union of South Africa (EAWUTUSA). I was appointed general secretary, responsible for setting up the structures of the new union.

### **COSATU missed the boat**

At our first national congress, held in late 1985 at Broederstroom, I was elected general secretary of EAWUTUSA.

Representatives of both COSATU and NACTU were invited to attend, but only NACTU responded. In my opinion the input from NACTU's spokesperson persuaded the majority of workers to vote for affiliation to NACTU. Although a number of EAWUTUSA workers were supportive of COSATU, there was no COSATU spokesperson to articulate the federation's policies and principles. COSATU missed the boat.

A decision was also taken to affiliate to the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF).

My next major task as EAWUTUSA general secretary was to establish a single union in the metal sector within NACTU. I approached the Steel, Engineering and Allied Workers Union (SEAWUSA); Black Electrical Workers Union and the United Motor and Allied Workers' Union (UMAWUSA) on the question of unity.

In May 1989 we managed to unite with some NACTU unions to form the Metal Electrical Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA). SEAWUSA and UMAWUSA said they were not ready for the merger as they had internal problems, but would join later. I was elected general secretary of MEWUSA.

### **Independence from SAEWA opened doors for us**

Since the breakaway from SAEWA we have gained recognition and respect from COSATU and NACTU unions. Our horizons have been broadened, in terms of getting more engaged in the struggles of workers and of the oppressed masses. We have had joint campaigns together with COSATU and NACTU unions.

Presently I am on the Central Committee of NACTU and am its representative in the National Economic Forum. I also represent workers at the Industrial Council. Internationally, I am MEWUSA's representative at the IMF.

As a person who has been humiliated on several occasions, I am doing my level best to see to it that workers' aspirations and feelings are being represented at every forum.

### **Political and family life**

MEWUSA's first congress resolved to be non-aligned to any political party, although individual members can belong to any political organisation. MEWUSA is not apolitical.

Because of the intensity of my work and lack of free time, I have not joined any political organisation. My sympathies lie with the ANC, not the PAC. This might be surprising, considering I am in NACTU's CC. I am committed to my federation.

I am married with two daughters and a son. My family is very concerned that I do not spend enough time with them. My son, an athlete, would love to see me at the sportsgrounds every Saturday. When I cannot make it he becomes sulky. I have never been next to him when he needs me.

My wife, a data processor, is quite upset with me. She thought after the release of Mandela and all the political leaders, we would lead a normal family life. But life has not changed. I am hardly at home and when I am there, I have to catch up with reading and prepare for the coming meetings. Most union meetings take place on Saturday.

It is difficult to satisfy your family and the workers. Someone always suffers. It bothers me a lot. ☆

# WORKERS' WORLD

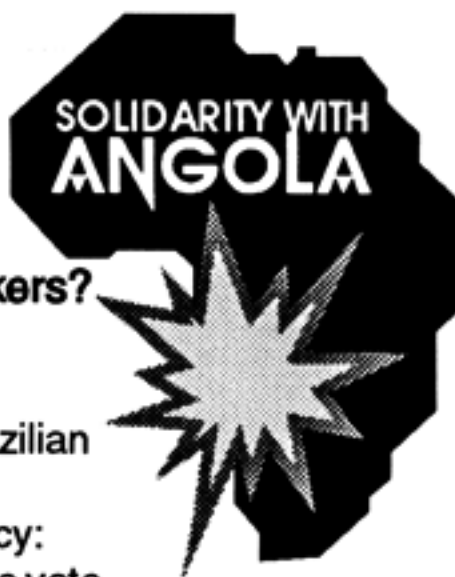
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