

# EVERYTHING'S NOT O.K.

For over 5 weeks now, 10 000 OK Bazaars workers in 137 stores, warehouses and hyperamas throughout the country, have been on legal strike. This is the longest and largest in the history of the retail industry in South Africa. Despite the vicious attacks by OK's security guards and the S.A.P., workers remain determined and united.



## demands

The frustrations experienced by OK Bazaars workers, brought about by poor working conditions, unfair dismissals, low wages and racist behaviour, has reached breaking point.

### The workers are demanding:

- \* an increase of R160 per month, backdated to April 1986.
- \* a minimum wage of R450 per month.
- \* a 20% staff discount.
- \* women on maternity leave to get the same increase when they return to work.
- \* workers in the bantustans to get the same benefits.
- \* reinstatement of those unfairly dismissed.

## facts

Over a two-year period, OK has dismissed almost 2000 workers, decreasing the number of workers at the company from 25 000 to 23 000. Yet, the number of OK stores have increased from 180 to 200. This means there are less workers doing more work. OK must not use the economic situation as an excuse. The company's operating profits for 1986 stood at R35.3 million. OK says that their profit after tax was R12.97 million. The average income of each of OK Bazaars' directors is R138 500 per year, and this without the massive bonuses and benefits they receive

## starvation wages

The average salary workers receive at OK is below R300 per month. This is hardly enough to live on. Many of the workers at OK are breadwinners. They have children to feed, shelter and clothe. Workers have totally rejected OK's offer of an R85 increase on an anniversary date system starting April 1987 (i.e. workers get the increase on different months depending on when they started with the company). This means that some workers would only get the increase in 1988.

Last year, according to an agreement with OK, workers were promised a review of their salaries if OK's profits increase. In spite of their increase in profits, the worker's salaries remain low.

## racist behaviour

It has emerged that OK in some branches resorts to racism in order to divide the workers. At OK Carlton Centre for instance, a shop steward, Poppie Davis, was victimised because she was so-called 'coloured' and, according to management at that store, should not represent so-called 'African' workers. Yet, Poppie Davis was elected by all the workers.

## hypocrisy

The South African Breweries and Premier Milling have substantial shares at OK bazaars. These two companies are in turn largely controlled by Anglo American. The directors of these companies, e.g. Tony Bloom and Gavin Relly, have strongly pronounced anti-apartheid sentiments. These capitalists have also travelled to Lusaka where they met the ANC to discuss the future of South Africa. We are telling these forces that the workers are not deceived. They will decide the future of this country. Workers increasingly are not deceived by mere anti-apartheid statements anymore.

## pickets

Workers have embarked on picketing at many OK stores to publicise their demands. Although the pickets are carried out in a very disciplined fashion, they have been provoked, intimidated, assaulted, arrested and even shot at.

# OK

# AT THE O.K.

## abuse of power

We condemn in the strongest terms OK's abuse of power and their collaboration with the police. OK has resorted to brute and naked force to put down a peaceful, legal, just and disciplined strike by underpaid and discriminated workers.

By their high-handed handling of the strike, OK has shown it does not have the interests of the public at heart. By their wanton actions they have risked the lives and limbs of both customers and workers. The intimidatory and illegal actions of OK will not be lost on all reasonably minded people.

## negotiations

After consistently blocking all sincere attempts at resolving the dispute, management finally gave in during the fourth week of the strike. They agreed to mediation. Negotiations are continuing, but management remains stubborn. The dispute will in all likelihood not be resolved soon.

## support work

An interesting feature of the strike has been the massive and continuing support of the oppressed community. Organisations at loggerheads with each other have rallied together to support the workers. The support committees are made up of organisations such as Azapo, Cosatu,

# CARES FOR PROFIT NOT PEOPLE!



## people before profits

UDF, Cusa-Azactu, Azasm, Soso Azanyu, Action Youth and numerous other groups. The committee is stepping up its support work in many ways. One example is trolley demos, where goods are piled onto trolleys at OK stores and taken to the check-out counter. Many members of the committee have been assaulted, and forcibly and illegally detained by OK's security guards.

The OK workers have for many years suffered much misery and hardship. They are determined to hold out until OK sees reason and, for a change, puts people before profits. The workers and their union, CCAWUSA, need all the support we can give them.

