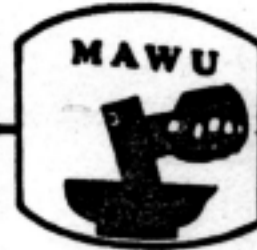




Metal & Allied Workers Union

# METAL WORKERS

## 'AS HARD AS STEEL'



Metal & Allied Workers Union

Since its birth, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) has been at the forefront of the struggle of workers for better wages and working conditions. The large majority of its members are unskilled migrant labourers, who eke out an existence in the compounds, foundries and factories of the ruling class. They are vulnerable - their jobs are not secure and so is their right to live in the cities. Township dwellers face a daily life of uncertainty and fear in the face of massive state repression and violence, high rents and high prices of food and other goods.

The MAWU strike wave of 1985 was characterised by a high degree of self-discipline, a willingness by workers to sacrifice life and

limb, and a sophisticated strategy of bargaining from a position of strength

In Pretoria, 900 workers at four factories under Asea were on strike for over three weeks. Two thousand workers of Haggie Rand in Germiston and Johannesburg were on strike. They demanded that wages be at least R3.50 per hour. The present minimum wage set by the Industrial Council is only R1.96 an hour. Workers at Haggie Rand occupied the factories on 4 February 1986. They feared that if they left for home other desperate unemployed workers would take their jobs. They were determined to sit-in, despite having little food or money. Workers at Haggie Rand were re-instated on March 24th. The company agreed to begin

negotiations before April 15th.

At Asea Cables, the bosses are taking a hard line. At one factory the bosses are insisting that the union first sign a recognition agreement. This despite having been involved in negotiations with the union before the strike. At Kent Metres, however, workers were given the key to the factory!

Despite hunger, boredom, bosses scuttling for eviction orders from courts, morale was high amongst workers involved in the sit-ins. MAWU was confident throughout the proceedings, given the backing of whole communities (as in Pretoria and Bophuthatswana Asea), and the residents in Katlehong (for Haggie), as well as the support from the Johannesburg MAWU Support Group.

### MAWU WORKERS ON THE MARCH



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