

# CHILD CARE CENTRES NEEDED

IN this the last article in the present series on women workers' issues, Liza Makalela, from the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, looks at the issue of child care. She looks at the problems worker mothers face once they have had the child and she argues that the employer's responsibility should not just end with maternity. Sister Makalela says many of the large number of infant deaths are caused by improper child care. Because of the lack of child care facilities the mother is often forced to leave her child in the care of inexperienced, and expensive, child minders.

THE unions started looking at the issue of child care after being alarmed by the rate at which infant deaths are running. Statistics show that in 1980 there were 112 deaths per 1 000 black children born. This is unacceptable to us as it is much higher than other race groups. Many of these deaths are caused by improper child care.

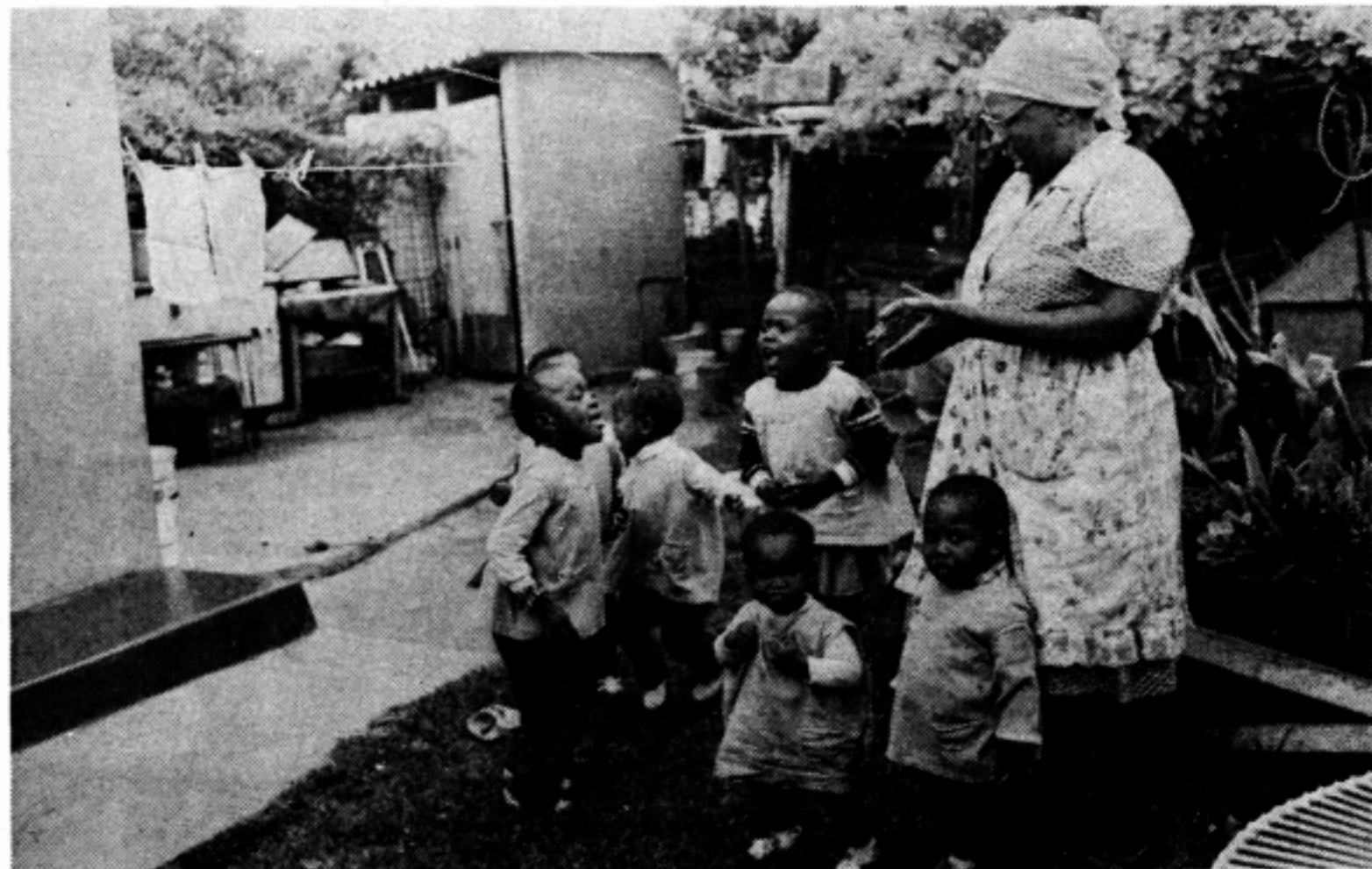
A mother with a young child is forced to leave it with a child minder. In many cases these child minders do not have the slightest knowledge about caring for a baby. Sometimes child minders are minors as well. Thus the child is being deprived of proper feeding and care, especially at the critical age from birth to six months. In Johannesburg there are about 200 unregistered child minders who care for over six children at time. These unregistered child minders belong to the unemployed, pensioned and often illiterate group. Working parents are forced to leave their babies with these people as there are no facilities provided for babies

under the age of three years and there are no qualified child minders.

These child minders do not look after the children free of charge. They regard this as employment and charge high fees which workers cannot afford and on which the child minder has to survive. For example, workers cannot afford R30 per month per child plus food. Whereas the child minder cannot easily live on R30 per month.

Babies are faced with many hazards: illness, suffering, insecurity, frequent and preventable visits to a doctor and most of all — death. On top of all these, you will realise that not only a child suffers, the parents go through a hard time too. Most of us are parents who know how it hurts to have a sick and unhappy child, let alone a hungry one.

Medical evidence has shown that if babies are not breastfed for a period of six months after birth then the chance of their catching killer stomach and lung



diseases is greatly increased.

Okay, it might be argued that parents can prepare meals for their babies every day so as to maintain a balanced diet. This does not work out. Child minders have six or more children to look after and some parents cannot afford to make a double supply. The child minder is also starving so what makes a mother sure that her baby is getting the right food or indeed any food at all?

Now to turn to kindergaten age. The state has built creches for black children. These creches admit children aged three years.

These cater for children who are registered in the urban area, but what happens to migrant workers' children who despite what the law says will always be there?

These creches are overcrowded. Many registered children cannot be admitted. This causes a continuous lack of proper care and as a result parents are forced to depend on child minders with all the associated problems.

In addition, the creches do not have enough playing and teaching equipment and the diet is inadequate — pap and soup every day.

**Demands:**

\* We need to have nurseries. Employers should accept collective responsibility for providing facilities for child care. They cannot hide behind the government's failure to provide these facilities. It will be advantageous to employers because it will reduce the number of absentees due to child care responsibility.

\* Recreational facilities or youth centres for young people. These would be useful as the young people would be able to use their free time constructively.

## 'Retrenchment an excuse to get rid of me' says 55-year-old Brown Lung victim

IF it hadn't been for the National Union of Textile Workers' Brown Lung Campaign, Gretta Maphumulo wouldn't have known exactly what she was suffering from.

Gretta is a 55-year-old woman and the mother of three children. Her eldest son has moved from the one-roomed shack which the family is living in at Umlaas near St Wendolins in the district of Pinetown.

She told FOSATU Worker News that she started working at Pinetex — a Frame group factory — in 1974. Her starting wage was R11 a week.

'I was quite healthy and strong when I started working for Frame but now after 10-years, I find myself being a total wreck,' Gretta said angrily.

She has just discovered that she is suffering from a killer disease called Brown Lung. Doctors say it is caused by exposure to cotton dust and is incurable.

Gretta had been working at the Pinetex mill in the spinning department which she described as 'very dusty and airtight'.

After working for several years she started coughing. At first she didn't take much notice although she visited the company doctor regularly.

'A year later I was not only coughing but also sneezing,' she said. At this time she was hospitalised and given cough mixture.

She said she found it strange that the company doctor could not diagnose the disease which is supposed to be the company's 'priority' concern.

Gretta left the Pinetex mill on May 18, 1984 when she was retrenched.

She said that when her sickness got worse, she consulted a private doctor who also treated

her with cough mixture.

'The doctor gave me two days off sick, but soon after that I was among the few who were selected for retrenchment.'

Gretta said she strongly believed that the retrenchment was just an excuse to get rid of her because she could no longer work as hard as before because of the cotton dust disease.

She said she was 'indebted' to NUTW whose health and safety officer, Dr Neil White, was the first doctor to discover that she had Brown Lung.

### Permanently disabled

The NUTW recently held a major campaign against Brown Lung at the New Germany Frame mills. During the campaign, Gretta went to be tested and was found to be permanently disabled.

Her condition is now so bad that because of the tightness of her chest, it takes her two hours to walk from the main road to her house — a distance of less than a kilometre.

Recently the NUTW's health and safety officer took her to King Edward hospital for an X-ray and from there to the union's lawyer in order to draw up an application for Workmen's Compensation.

Asked what she thought of the company's promise not to fire any victim of Brown Lung, Gretta dismissed the promise as 'make believe'. 'That company doesn't want sick or old people,' she said.

Gretta still remembers the old strikes for higher wages that took place at Frame. She said that although the union was still struggling to win recognition, she was confident NUTW would

win in the end.

She recalled the time when she was getting R11 a week. At the time of her retrenchment, she was getting R45,85 and she believes that it is the NUTW members who forced the company to increase wages.

But Gretta said even this wage was not enough 'because the cost of food, transport and clothing has gone up so badly.'

Gretta said she first joined the union in 1982.

'I was lured into joining the

'red card' union (TWIU) but it wasn't too long before I realized that this union was useless so I switched to the National Union of Textile Workers' said a smiling Gretta.

As the sole breadwinner, Gretta said she just manages to support herself and her two daughters by selling vegetables and by doing a bit of sewing.

'It is only through the mercy of God, the Almighty, that we are still managing to survive,' she concluded.



Gretta Maphumulo — a victim of the killer cotton dust disease

## Equal wages for women!

THE struggle to end discrimination against women recently took another step forward in the Transvaal.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union has negotiated equal wages for women workers at Recycling Plastics at Elandsfontein.

This factory was paying a miserable minimum wage of 89c per hour.

This minimum applied to women on the bottom grade. These women make up half of the total workforce.

During negotiations management agreed to scrap this 'womens' grade' and bring the minimum rate up to that of male workers.

This resulted in many women receiving an increase of 45c per hour — or R20,25 per week.

In another incident in the Transvaal, intervention by the union prevented pregnant women workers being placed in a position detrimental to their health.

At Hi-Pack Plastics at Germiston, pregnant workers were told that they had to work night shift.

When they refused, the company dismissed them.

CWIU shop stewards and organisers took up the issue with management.

After heated negotiations, the company agreed to re-instate the women on day shift work.