

THE All Blacks rugby tour was called off in July just a week before the team was due to leave New Zealand. It was determined protest and resistance to the tour by people here and overseas which led to the cancellation.

Particularly significant was the downing of tools by 3 000 National Automobile and Allied Workers Union members at Volkswagen's Uitenhage plant when they learnt that the company was preparing courtesy kombis for the tour.

At the risk of losing their jobs, given the present recession, workers took a stand against something which they believed was clearly not in their interests.

Les Kettledas, NAAWU Eastern Cape regional secretary, said at the time that NAAWU members were protesting at the building of the buses for a privileged minority while their townships burned.

And Joe Foster general secretary of FOSATU said the action of the 3 000 was in line with FOSATU's stand on the tour.

'We took a decision at our last Central Committee to support all those who are against

this tour.'

He said FOSATU had sent a telegram to the New Zealand union federation expressing its opposition to the tour and had received a reply saying that the New Zealand body would do all it could to prevent the tour taking place.

For the NAAWU members at VW it was a long bitter struggle to stop the company from providing the courtesy kombis.

Suspicious

Shop stewards from the paint shop first reported their suspicions about the kombis on July 5. It had come to their notice that kombis painted black with silver stripes were being built.

This created suspicion among workers who knew the All Blacks' colours. The full time shop stewards contacted management to find out why the kombis were being built.

On July 9 shop stewards learnt that another two kombis in Springbok colours had been built. It became clear to paint shop and assembly line workers what the company was up to.

By this time eight kombis had been built with 'All Blacks Tour 1985' painted on them.

Another two were still on the production line.

The labour relations manager was asked to meet with all shop stewards to discuss the issue.

At the meeting shop stewards were told that kombis were not selling well on the market. Management said they thought it was a good opportunity to advertise and that it was the cheapest form of advertising as it would not cost them a cent.

But workers did not see why they should contribute their labour to building these kombis.

They felt that the South African government should solve the internal problems which affect the majority of the oppressed without buying the support of the outside world at the expense of the oppressed masses.

Plant closed

Management said that top management had to be contacted to make a decision about the kombis. In the meantime they decided to close the plant 'as workers had become very emotional about the issue'.

Workers calculated that 24 kombis were to be built and that this would cost thousands of rands.

They felt management should rather put that money into workers' pay packets and not spend it on kombis built by their sweat.

They demanded that the eight kombis that had already been built, and were parked in the shipping yard, be brought to the main plant. These, they said, should remain there for everyone to see until the All Blacks tour had ended.

Tempers fly

Another round of discussions between the NAAWU shop stewards and management took place but no compromise could be reached and tempers began to get high.

That meeting ended with an agreement that the kombis would not be shipped out as long as negotiations were in progress.

When workers heard this the next day, July 11, they said that they could not believe management and that they would not start work until the kombis were parked on the

company premises.

At a further meeting, the VW finance director gave a long presentation showing the losses of the company and the drop in sales of VW kombis.

Tempers again became very high. The only guarantee management gave was to say they would give the keys of the kombis to the shop stewards. They said they were not prepared to bring the kombis back to the main plant because they feared they would be damaged.

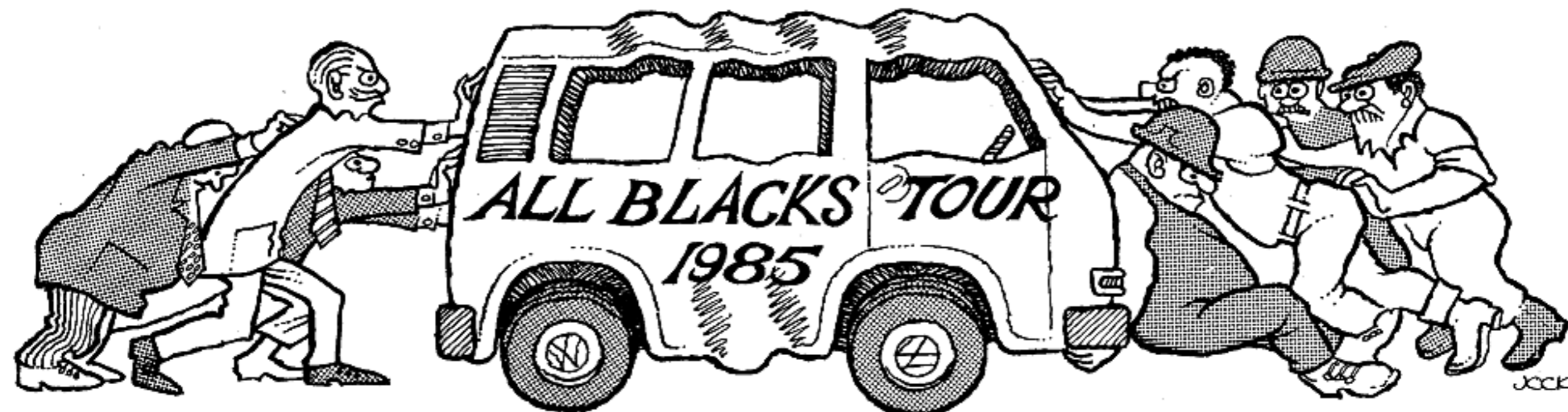
During the report back, workers told shop stewards to go to the shipping yard to check whether the kombis were still parked there. The shop stewards were told to monitor them on a daily basis until the tour was over.

On Monday July 15 management announced that the tour had been called off.

Workers decided to return to work on July 16. They demanded that all the kombis either be repainted or that the emblems be removed from them and they then be sold on the market.

Management agreed to remove the emblems and more kombis will be now produced in the same colours and then sold.

Tussle at VW over tour kombis



Rowen's strike clause

JACOBS motor component manufacturers, Rowen, and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union have signed a unique strike agreement.

The strike agreement says that in the case of an 'authorised strike' the company agrees not to dismiss any strikers as long as the strike does not last longer than four weeks (20 working days).

An authorised strike can be called by the union after all the procedures laid down in the recognition agreement have been followed.

The strike agreement goes some of the way in providing protection to workers who have followed the lengthy dispute procedures before taking any action.

As very few strikes last long-

er than four weeks in this country, this is the nearest South African workers have got to achieving the right to strike.

The right to strike, as it is practised in Britain, prevents the company from firing strikers no matter how long their stoppage lasts.

However, in South Africa the common practice is for the company to immediately fire strikers whether they followed the lengthy dispute procedures or not.

NAAWU organiser, Edwin Maepe said the agreement 'recognises strike action as a normal part of industrial relations'.

'Until employers recognise the strike as a legitimate option for workers, industrial relations in this country will be doomed to chaos,' he added.

Paid May Day won in Natal

ANOTHER two companies organised by FOSATU affiliated unions have won May Day as a paid public holiday.

In 1983 FOSATU unions and other independent unions began a campaign to revive May Day in South Africa.

A major part of this campaign has been to negotiate May 1 as a paid public holiday so that workers can fully celebrate this international workers' day.

Since then May Day has fea-

ured as one of the demands put forward by the unions during the annual wage negotiations at both factory and industrial council levels.

In 1984 Pilkington Glass in Port Elizabeth became the first factory to get May Day as a paid holiday.

Now recently, two Natal firms — Wayne Rubber and Van Leer — have agreed to give their workers the day off on May 1 and to pay them their full wages except when May Day falls on a weekend.

Pension money needed by workers

WORKERS at Volkswagen in Uitenhage have been working short-time since October 1982. Increasingly they have found it difficult to meet their living costs.

The situation has become so bad that many can no longer afford to pay the debts they have at various shops. But they have been forced to pay their debts by the shops' lawyers.

Workers have now called for withdrawal from the company pension fund and for their pension money to be paid out to them. They went on strike over the issue but returned to work when the company agreed to pay out their pensions on

August 30.

In a letter to VW management the workers set out their position clearly:

'Our union does not accept that due to the unwillingness of the company to meet the workers' demands, such as improved lay off benefits, severance pay and a decent living wage, workers should be forced to resort to the withdrawal of their pension benefits.'

'However, due to the immediate needs of the workers resulting from loss of earnings due to the short hours of work, pressure from the shops to which they owe money, and the bad economic situation which pre-

vails, the union has no option but to support the withdrawal of pension benefits on an optional basis.'

In the letter the VW workers criticised the company for not considering the workers' financial problems when it was approached for financial assistance.

The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union has called for discussions with management on the long term objectives of the pension scheme — whether the present one should be kept or another one which better suits the needs of workers should be opted for.

Dock workers blockade S A cargo

SOUTHAMPTON dock workers belonging to Britain's Transport and General Workers Union on Thursday July 31 refused to load a computer controlled milling machine ordered by a South African company.

The workers believe the milling machine is intended for the Atlas aircraft company, and so is a breach of the United Nations' arms embargo which bans the selling of military equipment to South Africa.

Berox Machine Tool, manufacturers of the machine, said it did not fall within the scope of the United Nations' arms embargo regulations.

But the Anti Apartheid

Movement, which alerted the dockers, says the machine will be used to maintain fighter aircraft although it was consigned to the Johannesburg-based company, Fritz Wallaberger Machinery.

Britain's Guardian newspaper reported that it had documents which showed that Atlas was the real buyer and that Fritz Wallaberger Machinery was getting a 10 percent commission for handling the deal. The milling machine is worth about R89 000.

The British Department of Trade and Industries and the Department of Customs are in-

vestigating the allegations but workers have warned that they will not necessarily accept a decision clearing the machine for export.

Meanwhile, the Safmarine container SA Sederberg has left Southampton without the milling machine.

In another action by dockers, Australian workers at Sydney harbour have refused to handle South African cargo aboard the Saffocean container ship, Mildura.

The dockers refused to handle the cargo as a protest against the current State of Emergency and the mass detentions.