

I came to the urban areas with someone from home. I found the city a strange and ugly place. Finding work was not an easy task. My brother-in-law found a job in a factory where an old friend worked. The work was very hard and there were no other vacancies. I eventually found work in a factory which made boxes in Kempton Park but did not stay long as it was so far away from Driefontein Hostel where I had managed to get a bed. I worked for a while on the East Rand in a number of jobs and went home as often as I could.

Over the years it became more and more difficult to spend much time at home. The money which had been saved did not seem to last. There were children to feed and the eldest ones had now started to go to school, which was very expensive. The times spent at home became shorter and the periods between visits longer and longer. It was after one of these short visits that I found work at the foundry called Rely Precision Castings and I worked there for over seven years until May 1980 when management fired all of us because of a strike. I want to tell you of my work inside the foundry as a furnaceman. I will also tell you of the difficulties migrant workers have.

I had come to the city to find work. And now in Boksburg I discovered that workers from the country-

side can only get lower jobs than township people. In those places where workers are gently treated we are not needed. We are only needed in those places where there is rough work.

The work in the foundry was hard and dangerous and the hours were long. But I stuck out the tough and unsafe working conditions because there was no other place to go. We were the only people who could do this kind of work, and this was well known to our employers. Many of them knew migrant workers were the best workers. We were also prepared to do the heaviest of work. But they treated us badly and still didn't treat us like human beings but like animals. They knew that as soon as they expelled us we would lose a place of residence, because we would not be able to pay the hostel fees without the money we earned. Then the pass office would be indifferent and instruct us to go back where we came from. That was very painful. But what is more painful is this. It is clear that profits mean more to the bosses than our lives. Our children could die in the countryside but they would still fire us.

This bad treatment became too much to bear so we organised ourselves in order to do something about it. But first I want to show what kind of work a furnaceman does.

A furnace is like a large oven powered by elect-

ricity. The heat from the mouth of the furnaces at Rely makes you weak. The white-hot light is so bright that you cannot look into the furnace without a mask to protect your eyes.

Your job is to hook an overhead trailer full of molten metal and pour the metal into moulds. The job is very dangerous and you are given no training at all, but just sent in with the others. After about two months you get the hang of the job. But before that many are sacked because they recoil from the fires. It was this job that I did for seven years the work of a furnaceman. But inside the Foundry they call you a cast-boy.

One of our main complaints about our small foundry was this. We were not given proper safety boots and overalls. And we were still supposed to do a dangerous job.

There are many accidents at the furnace when we pour and when we carry pots. Very often the molten metal falls out of the pot and burns us. It can burn you from the waist down, mostly on the legs. We only have boots on and when the metal spills, it gets into your boots. There is no way you can escape the danger of burning. We could use coats, arm covering, gloves and boots, but the firm does not give them. We are two or sometimes four people carrying a pot - we have to pick it up. If someone is not experienced

# Furnace heat makes you weak But the union makes you strong!

we will always spill. Even with experienced men we may have an accident if we have to pick the pot up very high to pour into a big mould. I have been burned so many times I can't count.

At Rely we were not even given strong safety boots. If we stepped on a hot piece of metal, the load of molten metal could be spilled. Other workers could also be badly injured or even killed by boiling metal.

There is also a big danger if the furnace explodes. When the furnace is nearly empty only the sand is left at the bottom and it can explode. If it starts to explode it cracks. The metal will fly all over the room.

a story by **Mandlenkosi Makhoba**

You must rush to switch it off. If you are near you are going to burn.

I tell you these things to give you an idea of how we worked. This is why we stood up united about the unsafe conditions at work. It was the first complaint we mentioned to the union organiser when we met him in the office at Benoni. But there were also other problems where we worked.

Mandlenkosi Makhoba is a metal worker on the East Rand where he has worked for the past twenty years. This story is part of a book called 'The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers' (Ilanga Lizophumelo Abasebenzi). The book has been jointly published by FOSATU and Ravan Press and is the first in a new Workers' Series. It will be officially launched at the FOSATU Education Workshop on July 14. 'The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers' tells how Mandlenkosi joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union and the struggles metal workers fought in the factories on the East Rand. Mandlenkosi says in the book, 'I tell this story to remind you of your life. I tell this story so you will remember your struggle and the story of the struggle we fight.'

