

FOSATU

WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



SEPTEMBER 1983 NUMBER 24

THE FIGHT FOR A LIVING WAGE

THE National Automobile and Allied Workers Union has declared a truce over wages with the three major motor manufacturers in the Eastern Cape – Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen.

This follows this year's lengthy wrangle over interim wage increases where the motor employers had been reluctant to even meet the rising cost of living.

However, the message from NAAWU's motor workers is clear:

'We may have agreed to accept an increase to cover the cost of living this year, but we have not given up our fight for a living wage.'

DEMAND

NAAWU's negotiating team, which included full time officials and senior shop stewards from all three companies, said after the negotiations that the R3,50 an hour demand was still on the table.

Last year's negotiations which were also around this demand for a living wage were marked by a mass strike by well over 10 000 motor workers.

This year, although the wage talks did not lead to a

strike, the negotiations were just as tough.

The tone of the wage talks was set by a letter sent in April to NAAWU by the employer's association saying that in view of the recession, the motor companies were adamant that negotiations be deferred until the last quarter of the year.

This would mean that workers would only get an increase in 1984.

Throughout the talks the employers tried to wriggle out of giving workers any wage increase.

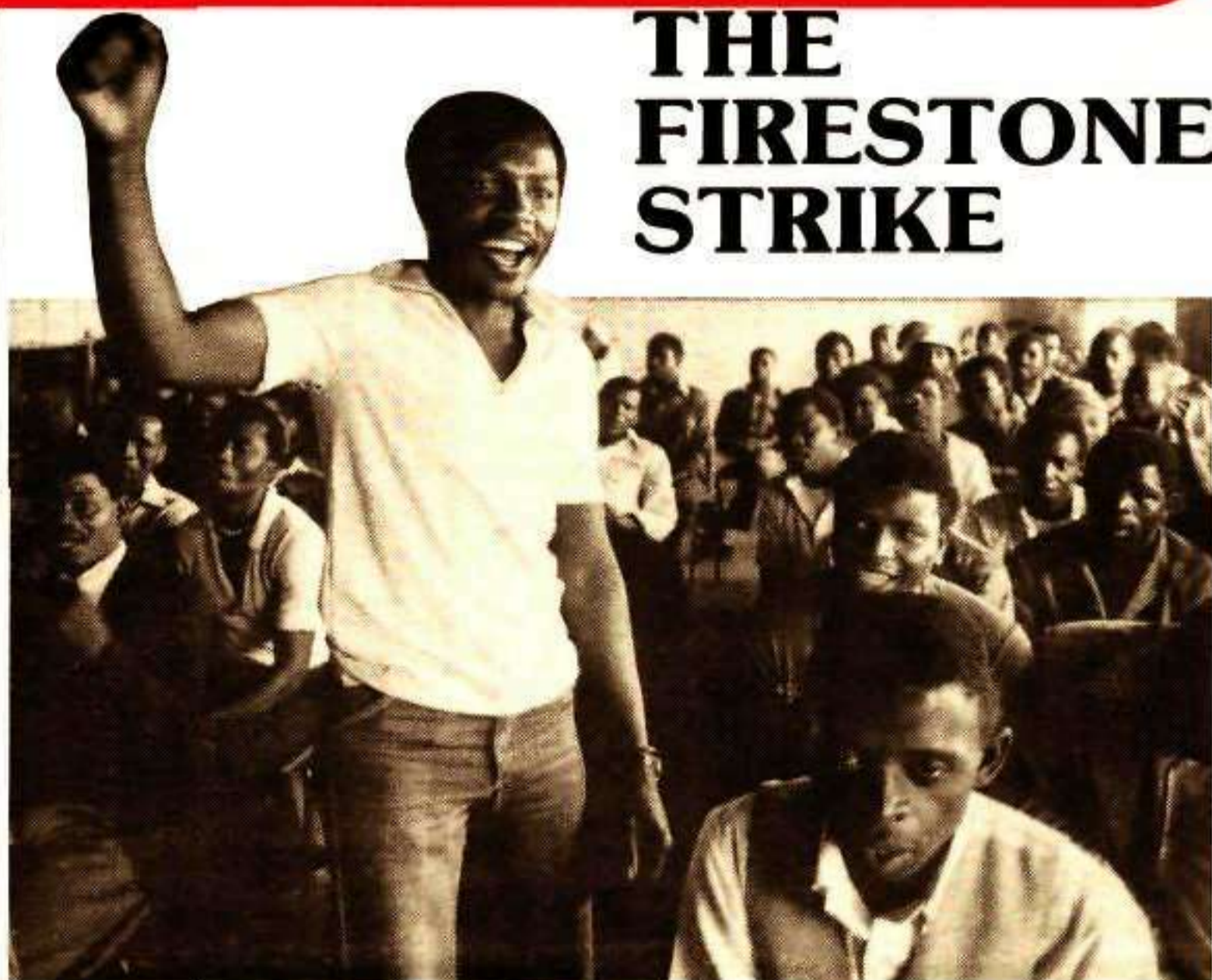
NAAWU responded to the letter by rejecting their excuse and stated that to refuse to negotiate a wage increase for August would be a breach of the agreement.

MANDATE

The employers finally agreed to a meeting on July 4 but arrived saying they had no mandate to make an offer.

The employer's association even brought with them a slide show which set out to 'prove' the bad position the motor companies were in.

The NAAWU negotiating



THE FIRESTONE STRIKE

THE Brits industrial area is once again the scene of industrial unrest as Firestone workers strike in support of their demand for an immediate pay rise.

The Brits area is on the border of Bophuthatswana and because of its classification as an industrial 'deconcentration' point many of the factories have been able to get away with paying poverty wages.

However, union activity in this area is on the upswing with both the Metal and Allied Workers Union and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union recruiting members.

For the past ten months, dismissed workers from B & S Steel and Engineering have met everyday in a local hall in a show of defiance and solidarity.

The B & S workers are now awaiting the outcome of their

Industrial Court case where they have accused the company of union bashing.

The Firestone workers initially stopped work on August 18 in protest at the company's introduction of a wage increase without negotiating with NAAWU.

The workers returned to work when the company agreed to open talks with the union.

However, a week later they again stopped work in support of a demand for an immediate wage increase.

The workers have rejected outright a company proposal of a wage increase tied to a worker's productivity.

Through the wage talks the workers have already won the right to plant based bargaining and Firestone has agreed to raise the hourly minimum to R2.

In a further breakthrough, the company has also agreed to look at the possibility of changing from an incentive bonus to a measured day work system.

Under the present system, a worker can lose a quarter of his wages if he falls below the target.

Now the union and Firestone will be meeting to see if they can break this deadlock.

On going to press, the workers were still out and united in their rejection of a production tied increase.

However, the dispute shows signs of intensifying as the Security Police had approached workers and warned them to stop causing 'kak' at Firestone.

NAAWU condemned this 'unwarranted interference' by the police in what so far had been a peaceful stoppage.

team said the slides did not show the 'human suffering' that workers were going through.

OFFER

They demanded that the employers respond to the union's demand.

At the second meeting on July 28, the employers said they were prepared to make a 15c adjustment in December only, but if the unions persisted with an August wage increase they could offer 5c.

BEAR

This was slammed by NAAWU members in all the major motor plants.

They said that they were already having to bear the burden of reduced wages because of short time –

the employers should at least meet the cost of living increase.

NAAWU suggested an increase ranging from 16c to 32c based on the Consumer Price Index – which measures the rising cost of essential foodstuffs.

RESPONSE

The employers' response? They put forward an offer of an 8c to 16c for August and a further 10c in February next year.

The negotiating team rejected this offer as it was still below the inflation rate and would lead to an 'erosion' of workers' wages.

Finally on August 16, over a month after the first meeting, the employers agreed to a 10c increase backdated to August 1, a

15c increase in February and another 15c increase in August next year.

INCREASE

This offer was taken back to NAAWU members who agreed to accept it as the increases were 'in line with the current rate of inflation'.

Over the next year the motor industry's minimum wage rate will rise from its present R2,30 an hour to R2,70 an hour – an increase of 18,5 percent.

PREPARE

However workers said that when the agreement expires at the end of next year, the motor employers must be prepared to meet at least their living wage demand of R3,50.