

## THE JANUARY STRIKES

The hot months seem to be strike time in Durban. They really do. Last year it was February. This year it was January.

Last year, 100,000 workers were on strike. This year it was 10,000. Some people say it's the heat. But most people know it's the wages. What happened this time?

### A. HOW IT BEGAN

On Friday, 18th January, at about 2 p.m. workers in the morning and afternoon shifts at the Pinetex factory in New Germany were on strike. Why? A new government wage order for the light cotton section of the textile industry had been implemented. But no workers, works committees, or trade unions had been consulted about this. The wage order gave long service and skilled workers little or no increases. Since the wage order had been worked out the cost of living had risen by 12%. Some workers said that now they were getting a better wage they had lost their bonuses. They didn't like the way management was implementing this new wage order. So they went on strike to try and get a just wage for their labour. That was the beginning.

In the afternoon Mr Skene of the Dept. of Labour tried to persuade them to go back to work. He was unsuccessful. At 4 p.m. the workers walked out of the factory.

The night shift arrived. Would they join the strike? The buses they had come in were still waiting. They got back into them and went home.

### B. THE STRIKE SPREADS

Next day (Saturday 19th) 700 workers at Dano Textiles in Hammarsdale went on strike. The following Monday they were still on strike, together with 2,000 Pinetex workers. The same morning Dano Textiles in Pinetown went on strike. Towards the afternoon strikers went to other factories in the New Germany area. Strike fever spread through New Germany as more and more workers from other factories joined in the strike. It is notable that all of the Frame Group's Factories went on strike that afternoon. 10,000 workers from Seltex, Nortex, Natal Knitting Mills, Frametex, Pinetex, and Dano went on strike. Workers from three Hammarsdale firms - Dano, Progress Knitting Mills and Furpile were by then also on strike.

### C. THEY CALL THE POLICE

Mr A. Frame said he would reply to the workers of Pinetex on Monday morning. The workers waited, but though he was there he did not speak. Instead management called the police.

At Dano and Pinetex police stationed themselves outside the factories. Throughout that afternoon management made no attempt to bring about negotiations. The organizer of the National Union of Textile Workers, Halton Cheadle, was told by Mr A. Frame that he 'had nothing to say to the workers.' The police were called in at 1.00 p.m.

The workers demonstrated outside Seltex, singing and dancing. Police began taking sticks away from workers and they split the

workers into two groups. At 2.15 p.m. the police moved in and broke up the demonstration. 217 workers were arrested, and dogs were used to catch those who tried to get away.

Police surrounded a group of workers who were sitting on the grass. Mr A. Frame came and pointed to those who were 'good boys'. The others were arrested by the police. A white personnel officer and a black personnel officer both tried to push some workers back into the factory.

#### D. THE UNION CALLS DLADLA

Meanwhile officials of the National Union of Textile Workers (N.U.T.W.) were on the scene. When workers were arrested they telephoned to make sure the workers would have lawyers to defend their rights. On Monday evening the Branch executive committee of the Union, which has a member from each of the factories, talked for three hours. Since workers had been forced back into the factories and the police had been used, it was decided to call in a member of the KwaZulu Government, Mr Barney Dladla. Mr Dladla cancelled all his engagements in order to come down right away.

#### E. "PEANUTS"

On Tuesday morning, Mr Dladla spoke to 5,000 workers at Clermont stadium. He said he was behind the workers all the way in their demand for a living wage. He then led the workers on a march to the Frametex Factory, to talk to the management. With him were two branch Executive Members of the African Textile Union, Miss Rosina Pirrie and Gardiner Gladlile. Negotiations with the Frame Group management lasted four hours, while the workers waited. After this, Mr Dladla announced the increases just granted. They were increases of 40 cents and 80 cents per week (depending on length of service) with promises of further increases in July. Mr Dladla had a word for these increases. It was "peanuts".

#### F. TOGETHER

There was much dissatisfaction among the workers over the increases. present all workers are not united as members in the National Union of Textile Workers, and so they cannot bargain with their full strength. After the negotiations Halton Cheadle addressed the workers at the Clermont stadium. The workers went home thinking that the strike was only one battle in the struggle for a living wage.

They were going back together and would make themselves stronger before the next battle came.

## THE MOTOR ASSEMBLIES STRIKE

The Motor Assemblies factory in Prosper, Jacobs, is the only big car factory in Natal. It is the biggest factory in the area with more than 3,000 workers altogether, and when the 2,000 African workers went on strike during February, it was big news.

At Motor Assemblies about 450 of the African workers are members of the Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers' Union. This is a Coloured Union which has recently been organizing African workers. So when the workers at Motor Assemblies were unhappy with their pay the Union drew up proposals for wage increases for negotiation with management. On 27th January 1974 the African members of the executive of the Union agreed to these proposals which were then given to management to look at.

### Liaison Committee

On Friday, 8th February, before the management had done anything about the proposals, the factory's Liaison Committee went to the management and asked for a general pay rise for the African workers. The Committee was told to draw up more specific requests and come back the next Wednesday.

### R1 an hour

Tuesday 12th: Before the Liaison Committee could go back with their requests, the 400 workers in the body shop went on strike. Just after lunch they downed tools and called for a wage of R1 an hour. At the time most of the workers in the factory were getting 36c. per hour. The strikers demanded to speak to Mr. Devlin, the industrial relations manager, but were told that he was away in Cape Town. They then just sat around inside the factory till clocking out time. That night Devlin flew back from Cape Town so that he could do something about the strike.

Wednesday 13th: Soon after work started Devlin spoke to the body shop. He said he would fire all of them if they didn't go back to work. But that didn't hold. At 7 a.m. the paint shop and finishing shop went on strike and the upholstery shop started striking at 9.30. By 10.30 all the African workers had stopped working and they all gathered together outside the canteen. They sent the Liaison Committee to tell the management that they all wanted R1 an hour. While they were gone, everyone agreed to stick together whatever management replied. If they were told either to leave the factory or to start working, they would all do the same thing.

### Interim Committee

The Liaison Committee came back with this reply from management : an announcement about pay would be made on Friday and until then everyone was to go home or carry on working. The strikers did not like this. They became very dissatisfied with the Liaison Committee because it hadn't really done anything for them. It just told them what the management wanted. The strikers wanted to have people who were better able to talk for them, so they elected an interim committee.

### Management Apologises

Thursday 14th : The strike continued the whole day. Devlin spoke to the workers, asking them to go back to work or to go home till

Friday. He also apologised for threatening to fire the body shop. It seems that he realized that it had been the wrong thing to do and that it was better to talk to the workers nicely.

### Police Everywhere

Friday 15th : When the workers clocked in there were police with guns behind the factory outside the grounds and S.B.s at the gates in front. The workers waited for Devlin to speak to them. When he came he said that everyone would get an increase of 4c. an hour, no more. They had to collect their pay just as though they were getting paid off, and go home by bus at 11:30. Those who wanted to could come back to work on Monday.

Monday 18th: That morning the police were at the factory in large numbers. They had many guns, vans and dogs with them as they watched the workers go to work. Most of the workers went back because there was nowhere else to go although their wages had not increased very much. But now the management is beginning to listen to the proposals of the Union.

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