

## ISISIBENZI II

### AROUND THE UNIONS

#### METAL AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION

##### a) STERLING

After the strike at Sterling many workers were fired by management. However, as they were paid off some of the workers were told by management that if they returned in a few days they might be re-employed. This was not told to active Union members though. Many workers did return and were re-employed on condition that they no longer remained members of the Union. They agreed to this act of power on the part of their employers. Some workers believe that because so many were fired, if they had all remained united and refused to return to work until the management agreed to negotiate with them this could have been achieved. Under these conditions where there is no unity amongst the workers, their collective bargaining power is weakened and it is difficult for the Union organiser to assist with negotiations.

##### b) GENERAL

At Leyland Motors all the workers have been unionized. At Non-Ferrous Metal Works and Extruders (Jacobs) ; Dorman Long Rowans (S.A.) Ltd ; Glacier Bearings ; Defy Industries ; James Brown and Hamer ; Lawson's Motors and Smith's Industries a large percentage of workers have joined the Union.

### CLOTHING UNION

The Clothing Union's membership is growing steadily, and 300 of the industry's 1100 black workers have now been unionised.

The organiser of the Clothing Union, Joyce Gumede, is at present visiting clothing factories in order to secure stop order facilities for union members. This means that union members will have their subscriptions deducted from their wages by the factory management, who will then send it on to the union. In this way, union members do not have to visit the union office every time they wish to 'ay subscriptions.

So far, Joyce Gumede has visited Garland Clothing, Timaco Modes and Connoisseur Apparel. Two of these firms have agreed to co-operate, and the other will probably do so as well.

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### FURNITURE AND TIMBER WORKERS' UNION

The newly-started Union now has a fulltime organiser who visits factories on a regular basis before work and at lunch hours. The organiser is working in close co-operation with the organiser of the Registered "Furniture and Allied Workers Union" which is taking seriously TUCSA's call to "organise the unorganised workers of S.A."

A caretaker committee for the Union has been established, and committee meetings and shop steward training sessions are being held fortnightly. One of the most serious problems among the furniture workers who should be joining the Union is that they do not yet understand that the General Factory Workers' Fund (to which many or most belong) never intended to take up negotiations for workers or for wages and work conditions. The Union has started up to do just this, so Benefit Fund members must come and join the Union and hand in their old green cards.

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### CHEMICAL WORKERS' INDUSTRIAL UNION

This Union is still in the initial stages. The drive is for membership so that when the Union speaks it will speak on behalf of many workers in a factory - not a handful.

The stage has now been reached when a committee of factory leaders must be formed so attempts are being made to contact the most union-conscious workers in the Chemical factories as a first step towards this.

There is no organiser yet for this Union so it will depend on the workers in each factory to discuss who should represent them on the Executive and send these representatives to the office.

Once the workers have sent in their representative and an Executive Committee is operating, negotiations with management can begin.

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## LEYLAND : WERE THE WORKERS VICTIMISED BY MANAGEMENT?

Workers at Leyland Motor Corporation of South Africa Limited in Mcheni have been faced with many problems since a letter was sent them to the management calling for a referendum to be organised where the workers, their Union official Mr Alpheus Mthethwa, and the management would discuss the workers' grievances.

In this letter the workers made it clear that they believed it was important to have good communication between workers and management in the factory. However, management decided not to answer this letter and it was only four days later, after workers had approached management and asked if they had any reply, that the manager, Mr Lipp, said that he was not interested in discussing the workers' proposals with them. (He said that the workers could choose to do whatever they wanted but that he would not change his decision). So the attempt by the workers to bring themselves and management together for talks had been stopped by the power of the management to do as they wished. This happened on Friday 1st March.

### WORK STOPS

On Monday of the following week the workers decided to stop working, as all their negotiation attempts had failed. (The manager was asked to think again about the workers' request for a referendum. They also refused to restart work until the management agreed to negotiate with them). On Tuesday all the workers returned to the factory and awaited a reply from management, On the same afternoon they were fired. Mr Mthethwa phoned the manager in an attempt to try and get the manager to change his mind. The manager said "No". He said that he was not prepared to discuss the matter with a Union organiser because he believed that the Union did not have anything to do with his factory. But all the workers at Leyland are members of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union. The organised workers inside the factory are the Union and the organiser is employed by the workers to help them to negotiate proposals, like the referendum put forward by workers in the factory. The organiser attempted to bring down the head of Leyland Corporation, Lord Stokes, from Johannesburg to settle this dispute. He refused to interfere.

All this time the management was in contact with the Department of Labour. They were prepared to listen to people who are organised by the Government but they were not prepared to speak to the workers or their organiser. It was this same Dept of Labour official who advised the manager to fire the workers and obviously the manager listened to him.

The next day, Wednesday, all the workers who had been fired met at James Bolton Hall with their Union Secretary to discuss what could be done. Mr Mthethwa phoned Leyland head office in Johannesburg and was told that Dr F.P. Jacobsz was to come to Durban and try to settle their grievances. He did come and met with Mr Mthethwa and Mrs Harriet Bolton (Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union). It was agreed at this meeting that all those workers who were fired would be re-employed and that the workers would elect shop stewards to represent them. Dr Jacobsz said then (at that time) that the Union was welcome to meet management to discuss matters which were of interest and concern to both management and workers.

### THE AGREEMENT IS SIGNED

The workers met with Dr. Jacobsz outside the factory and an agreement was signed by them (the workers and Dr. Jacobsz). The condition of this agreement as put forward by the workers and accepted by him was

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that all workers would be re-employed and that they did not have to form a Works Committee or a Liaison Committee but would appoint six Shop Stewards to represent them. Dr. Jacobsz' condition was that he would only negotiate with those Shop Stewards who were Leyland workers and would not discuss matters with the Union Shop Stewards. The workers agreed to this condition and returned to work on Monday 11th March.

On Wednesday Dr. Jacobsz returned to Durban and told the six Shop Stewards that because the strikes in Britain had slowed down the importing of materials for the factory, management had decided to retrench (i.e. fire) sixty-five workers. While he was talking to these Shop Stewards, the Durban manager dismissed twenty-one workers. (Then Dr. Jacobsz, who had signed the agreement which acknowledged the Shop Stewards as the workers' representatives refused to allow these Shop Stewards to talk to their fellow workers!) The workers at Leyland, and Union officials, believe that management were dishonest with them and that they, the workers, had been victimized. Management also fired all the best Union leaders. Those workers who are still working at Leyland say that since the firing of their fellows they have suddenly started working a lot of overtime.

If there was so little work that 65 people had to be retrenched why so much overtime? It seems as if they are doing the extra work which would have been done by those who were fired. (Some of the workers had been working at Leyland and making profits for the company for eight to ten years.)

#### ANOTHER MEMORANDUM

After the mass firing or what management called retrenchment, workers drew up another memorandum and sent it to the management. They repeated their desire to have good communication and honest discussion with management. In the letter they said that if management was sincere in its dealings with the workers, they should re-employ all the workers they had fired and that if work was slack, as management had said it was, then workers were prepared to sacrifice their salaries by working short shifts so that there could be work for everyone. (They said that this decision concerned only themselves as workers, and that the management had nothing to lose). Dr Jacobsz replied to the workers and said that management had considered this short shift proposal but had decided that, for "economic reasons", it was not possible. This argument is unconvincing when we look at what has taken place at Leyland over the past few weeks, especially when we note (or remember) that four of the six Shop Stewards were among those who were fired.

But workers at Leyland have not been discouraged (or disheartened) and are continuing to struggle for recognition by management to discuss mutually the problem of wages and working conditions.

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## THE GENERAL FACTORY WORKERS BENEFIT FUND

**What is a Benefit Fund for? How does it help workers?**

The story of Mr Joshua Memela helps us to answer these questions.

Joshua Memela was employed by S.A.R. He had been contributing to the company Compulsory Savings Fund and on termination of his services he did not receive his contributions back. One of the Benefit Fund staff members phoned up the S.A.R. and gave a letter to Mr Memela making enquiries about the refund.

An official of the firm denied any knowledge of deductions. He wrote that at the back of the letter he had received. Later, after further enquiries had been made, S.A.R. promised to give him a refund after 10 days.

Later Mr Cheadle received a phone call from S.A.R. stating that a cheque had been sent to Mr Memela's address and requested Mr Memela to call at the office so that they could draft a letter to Johannesburg (the letter would be signed by the complainant).

The letter was then written. In this letter Mr Memela was complaining that he had not received his past contributions back.

Mr Cheadle took the letter personally to Johannesburg and lodged a complaint at the main office in Johannesburg. Sometime in November 1973 a card was received from the Chief Accountant informing the complainant that the office was still investigating the matter, after which a cheque for R36,46 was sent to Mr Memela c/o our address on the 23rd November 1973.

On 10th January 1974 Mr Davis made further enquiries from Johannesburg office as to how an amount of R36,45 was composed. A schedule dated 15th January 1974 showing the composition of this amount was received by the office and shown to the complainant.

Workers see how the Benefit Fund can help them, and its membership is growing rapidly. In the beginning we would sometimes have as many as 30 people joining in one day. But this year we have often had 60 new members joining in one day, and as many as 200 on a Saturday. More members means more work for the organisers to do and recently we had to employ two new staff members in the Benefit Fund. There is a branch of the B.F. in Pietermaritzburg as well as the main branch in Durban, and we now represent workers in more than 30 industries.

The Benefit Fund is growing, and it also helps the trade union movement to grow. It is as members of the Benefit Fund that workers at first unite together. After this unions are formed: each union unites all the workers in a certain industry. In this way six different unions have been established since the Benefit Fund was started. There are unions for workers in the following industries: textile, metal, furniture and timber, clothing and allied, transport and chemical. Meanwhile, workers in other industries continue to join the Benefit Fund. Soon it will be possible to establish unions for these workers also.

At present the B.F. provides funeral benefits and medical aid. It is hoped that in the near future it will also be able to provide a retirement benefit. The B.F. is also a watchdog which looks after the interests of individual members at their workplaces. When the B.F. receives a complaint from a member, one of the organizers telephones or writes a letter to the employer concerned. 90% of complaints

received are successfully dealt with like this. But what happens when employers refuse to do anything about complaints? In cases like this the B.F. can give legal advice to the member concerned. This is done on Saturday mornings. The B.F. also writes letters to employers to tell them that legal action will be taken if they take no notice of a just complaint. The Black Sash advice office at Bolton Hall has been established to help workers who have been wrongfully endorsed out of Durban.

At the end of January 1974 Mr David Davis, a B.F. official, was banned and placed under house arrest. He was one of the 'Bolton Hall Four' who were all banned at this time. We in the B.F. have not been intimidated or discouraged by this setback. Indeed, we now have more volunteers to help with the work than we had before.

To join the B.F. a worker pays 50 cents, and then 10 cents a week. Workers may become members by calling at Bolton Hall any weekday or Saturday.

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FUNERAL CLAIMS AS AT SEPTEMBER 1972

49 - 100's	=	R4 900,00
70 - 20's	=	1 400,00
5 - 40's	=	200,00
2 - 30's	=	120,00
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126 claims	=	R6 620,00
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FUNERAL CLAIMS AS AT THE 1st JANUARY 1974 - 31st MARCH

18 - 100's	=	R1 800,00
15 - 20's	=	300,00
2 - 40's	=	80,00
1 - 60's	=	60,00
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36 claims	=	R2 240,00
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FUNERAL CLAIMS PENDING (SOME DOCUMENTS OUTSTANDING)

9 - 100's	=	R900,00
1 - 60's	=	60,00
2 - 40's	=	80,00
2 - 30's	=	60,00
25 - 20's	=	500,00
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39 claims	=	R1 600,00
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## THE MEANING OF MUSIC

Here are the ideas of someone we know who is studying black music and dancing. We hope people write to us and tell us what they think about these ideas. Do people think they are right or wrong.

According to our friend, music and dancing have always been an important part of everyday life in the country areas of Africa. Most activities, work included, and all celebrations, include music. Also performers and audience are not divided - everyone joins in. Is our friend right?

She also told us about the changes which she thinks took place in black music when people started to move from the country to the town. The people who played and the people who listened to music were now separate. In the towns people began to do many different types of work - they began to experience many new problems at their place of work and at home. As a result they expressed themselves in new forms of music.

These days people listen not only to country music but hear on the radio other kinds as well, like Mqashiyo, Mbube, Spirituals and Jazz. Often the things which are sung about in the new types of music created in the city are not the same as those which are sung about in the country areas. A question which our friend thinks is important is this - Do the songs of the city express the experience of black people in the same way as the songs of the country do? What do people think about this?

There was a time when many songs were about the way Whites treated Blacks. One wellknown one is ..

"There comes the Big Van  
All over the country  
They call it the Pickup Van  
There is the Pickup  
There, there is the Big Van  
"Where's your pass?"  
"Where's your Tax?"

Is it true that fewer songs like these are sung than were before? Our friend thinks that today many musicians are more interested in money than in the experiences of their fellow black people who work in the cities and in the country. Also, songs which are about the unhappiness and suffering of Black workers are not heard over the radio because the radio follows government policy.

If you know any songs which are about the oppression of Black workers in the city or in the country we would be very happy if you would send them to us so that we can include them in the newspaper. Then other Black people who don't already know these songs will be able to learn them and pass them on.

## VICTORY FOR S.A.R. WORKERS

Last Monday, 22nd April, the thirteen workers who had been suspended for a week by the S.A.R. officials in Pietermaritzburg because of their refusal to work overtime, were re-employed. The reason they refused was because of the transport problem. Because the bus fares were about R13 per month the workers had to walk from Mkondeni to Mbali, a distance of about 13 kms. The railways were asked to supply subsidized transport, which was promised when the market moved to Mkondeni. This was never granted.

The terms of their agreement to going back was the granting of the long-awaited subsidized bus fare. The workers now pay 8c for the bus fare from Mbali to the station, and from the station to the market the S.A.R. provides transport at 56c per month. The total spent on transport thus works out at about R4,40 per month contrasted with the incredibly high cost of R13 before.

The importance of this agreement is that it illustrates what can be achieved through negotiation. It is a pity that pressures such as newspapers and attacks by M.Ps was also necessary to clearing up the problem. These would not be necessary if an effective democratically elected Union existed which could function as a safeguard for workers' rights while maintaining open the interests of the management through a system of open communication.

An organisation should not fragment into an employer - employee clash but should function as a whole system. Unions attempt to achieve this unity while maintaining harmony.

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### BUSES - THE MONEY YOU SPEND

At a meeting held in Pietermaritzburg on Saturday 28th April, an Action Committee of the Indian Ratepayers Association, members of the Metal & Allied Workers' Union and various African and Coloured representatives, protest was made about the recent bus fare increases PMB Corporation from 6c to 10c. Mr N. Middleton pointed out that the black commuter routes which were used more frequently, were being used to subsidize the lesser used white commuter routes.

The Union is vitally concerned with this problem. In Howick for instance the Mphendle Bus Service raised its fares on the Howick-Montrose route from 10c to 15c each way. This is a distance of 8 miles. As the Union has many members working at SARMCOL, the largest factory in Howick, they were concerned with this added hardship for the worker. Legal advice was sought but in the meantime women at Montrose location gathered outside the offices of the Superintendent of Montrose Township to protest against the increase. The Union is not clear on the position as yet. Rumour circulating is that the fares will rise but that a system of coupons would come into use. In this case the Union will recommend to the management of SARMCOL that it subsidizes its workers transport costs. Thus the Union shows that it can help the problems of the workers but the women at Montrose have shown their effectiveness by their protest.