

Management intimidates but workers go ahead

DESPITE considerable management intimidation there was a good response to the call for a stoppage in the Durban, Hammarsdale, Tongaat, Estcourt and Empangeni areas. Twelve textile factories stopped production, bringing out 10 430 workers; seven chemical factories were brought to stand-still 1 590 workers and two Mawu factories stopped production bringing out 240 workers.

The Burhose factory in Estcourt was where serious reprisals were anticipated. A strike occurred there in May last year and the Nutw had experienced an uphill battle for recognition ever since. Every known union contact had been worked out of the factory at some time or for some reason. The workers therefore considered it unwise for individuals exposed in leadership positions to assume a prominent role in the stoppage.

They thus arranged the stoppage in such a way that no leaders could be identified. A short while before the stoppage was scheduled workers started singing at their machines. They stopped their machines when the stoppage was due and kept singing. Workers then observed a period of silence, which was followed by 'Nkosi Sikelel' Africa' and then resumed work. Workers found it difficult to get the whole factory to participate due to the lay out of the plant and management intimidation, however, all the major sections were involved.

At Mooi River Textiles similar problems arose. The bosses said that they did not see why they had to become involved in a fight between the union and government. Even after the shop stewards had forced them to accept the stoppage, the management tried to prescribe which machines should be kept running. Workers however simply clocked out and each of the shifts stopped work.

At South African Fabrics a shop steward was fired before the stoppage for allegedly undertaking union business during working hours and this was still an issue at the time of the stoppage. During the stoppage the company tried to stop each department from

coming out. The managing director and other directors prowled round the factory immediately before and during the stoppage and there were continual loud-speaker calls while the stoppage took place. Management forced workers back to work when the meeting got onto the question of the reinstatement of the dismissed shop steward.

In 4 out of the 12 Nutw factories that stopped, Indians and Africans came out together and the stoppage was close to 100%.

At Robertson Stone workers clocked out of the factory during the stoppage, thereby forfeiting their pay for that period.

In several other factories where workers did not feel themselves sufficiently strong, lunch-time ceremonies were held. At Henkel relations between management and workers were so tense that workers felt that the stoppage might promote confrontation, a situation in fact materialised a few weeks later over other issues.

The good response from workers in the Durban area may be attributed in part to the fact that unions in the region to some extent anticipated the stoppage call. Both Nutw and Cwiu had national executive meetings in Durban the week-end before the strike call.

Delegates discussed the issue there, agreed to the idea of a stoppage and prepared a draft of the pamphlet call on workers to stop work. When the strike call was officially made by the FCWU on Mon 8, the unions in the area were therefore in a position immediately to put the campaign into full swing.

Nutw:

Hammarisdale	- Hebox 1 750, Progress Knitting 1 400, Natal Thread 550, Gelvenor 400.
Pinetown	- Smith and Nephew 750, Ninian and Lester 500, Regina 300, Nelba Prints 100, Stayflex 80.
Tongaat	- David Whitehead 1 500.
Mooi River	- Mooi River Textiles 1 000.
Estcourt	- Burhose 1 400.
Rosburgh	- S.A. Fabrics 650.

Mawu:

Jacobs - Robertson Stone 120, Krommenie 120.

Cwiu:

Umbongintwini - S.A. Tioxide 450
 Jacobs - ANCI Paints 270, Rivertex 150.
 Pinetown - Durapenta Plastics 450, Omega Plastics 120.
 Empangeni - Bonus Fertilizer 50
 Pietermaritzburg - Incorporated Laboratories 100

FOSATU, April 13

Solidarity but no mass stoppage

FOSATU, GWU and Saawu and the Cusa affiliate, the United African Motor Workers Union organised work stoppages in Durban. While most unions in the area expressed their solidarity with the protest they stated that they were unable to participate in the stoppage because of lack of time and organisational difficulties.

Saawu organised the work stoppage at 15 factories in Durban - Defy, AECL, Romatex, Brazier and Son, Oerlikon, Resinkem, Wespeco and Turnall, Coates Brothers, Nine Feathers, van Dyck Carpets, Motor Assemblies, Sandock, Noggy Food, Hyperama and Texfin.

They obtained prior agreement from management for 5, 10 and 15 minute stoppages during working hours. However Saawu admitted they did not have accurate figures of the support given by workers or whether workers at these factories had participated.

GWU, new in the Durban dock area, described the stevedores participation in the Aggett work-stoppage as "partial and sporadic".

The Association of Distributive and Allied Workers (ADAW) took a decision on behalf of its affiliates - the National Union of Distributive Workers (NUDW), the National Union of Commercial Catering and Allied Workers (NUCCAW) and the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA), to support the stoppage in principle.

ADAW approached individual managements and was notified of their co-operation the day before the stoppage was scheduled.

Because of the shortness of time and organisational difficulties specific to shop workers, the three affiliates did not call on their members to stop work.

The United African Motor Workers Union, a CUSA affiliate, said it had organised stoppages at two motor garages, Vivor Motors and Grosvenor Motors. No work-stoppage occurred amongst workers from the other CUSA affiliates – the Chemical Workers Union, the Food and Beverage Workers Union (based in Maritzburg), and the Building Construction and Allied Workers Union.

There was also no stoppage organised by the FCWU, the African Workers Association and the National Federation of Workers (NFW).

The NFW described one exception at the SASKO Bakery in Mtubatuba where workers downed tools from 11.p.m on the Feb 10 until 5 am on the Feb 11. While shop stewards negotiated with management over the retrenchment of 16 workers the striking workers paid tribute to Neil Aggett.

LYNNE LAMBERT, Mar 12

We last held May Day in 1950

"It is the duty of every trade unionist to organise functions vigorously to ensure that every worker can celebrate May Day in one way or another together with his/her comrades in all parts of the world".

THE celebration of May Day as an international day of solidarity amongst workers originated in Australia in 1856.

Workers organised a day of a complete work stoppage together with meetings and entertainment as a demonstration in favour of an 8-hour day. It was initially planned as an isolated event, but it aroused workers to such an extent that it was decided to repeat the event annually.

By 1886 the idea of a mass worker demonstration had reached the US, where workers also demonstrated for an 8-hour day. Workers in America were prevented from organising similar demonstrations in following years because of police and legal harassment. However, in 1890 workers again planned a demonstration for May 1. The International Workers Congress decided in 1889 to use this same day as an international proletarian celebration and so demonstrations were held throughout Europe as well.

May Day commemorations are celebrated in different ways. The first protests were rallies where large gatherings of workers listened to speakers who demanded primarily shorter working hours. May Day has also been celebrated by marches where workers have proclaimed the day as theirs to do as they please.

Internationally, May Day has become a manifestation of international worker unity and solidarity. It is an event that unites workers who are atomised by the barriers and structures of capitalism and imperialism.

However, in America during the Cold War Labour Day was moved to September and May 1 became celebrated as Loyalty Day. This reflected the reformist and pro-imperialist nature of the organised US labour movements.

In South Africa from 1926 sections of the workforce were able to get May Day included as a workers' holiday in their industrial council agreements. In 1961 the Nationalist government began to curb this right by interfering with these agreements. The then Minister of Labour wrote to Sactu saying the following:

"I have to advise you that it is not government policy to approve of wage determinations and industrial council agreements which provide for May Day as a public holiday".

May Day was celebrated by the progressive trade unions during the 1930's and by the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) during the 1940's. In other parts of the world workers have often organised marches whereby their demands are articulated to the employers and to the state.

In South Africa the first such demonstration was organised by the African Federation of Trade Unions where white and black workers were brought together under the slogans 'We Want Bread' and 'Work for Wages'.

The most significant May Day event in South African history occurred in 1950. On Mar 26 the African Peoples' Organisation, in conjunction with the Transvaal branch of the ANC, CNETU, the Johannesburg District Communist Party and the Transvaal Indian Congress, convened a 'Defend Free Speech Convention' in Johannesburg. It was called to protest the proposed Suppression of Communism Act.

These organisations called for a one day stay away on May Day. This was to be the first time that the stay away tactic was used. This demonstration also supported higher wages and other worker demands.

The stay away was heeded by a substantial number of workers (approximately half of the workforce). This essentially peaceful protest turned to violence when police intervened in arguments between returning workers and boycotting workers, killing 19 workers and injuring 30.

Other demands called for over the years by South African workers have been the recognition of workers' rights to form and join trade unions of their choice, the abolition of pass laws and influx control, the right to strike, a national minimum wage, the abolition of discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of race and sex and included leave, sick leave, medical aid, unemployment and pension benefits.

By the late 1950's May Day ceased to be celebrated by South African workers as their unions were smashed by the state. To this day May Day has not again been celebrated by workers in South Africa on an organised basis, nor have workers' basic demands been met.

SIMON RATCLIFFE, JOHANNESBURG, April 1.