

## **Wine and Spirits Union Growing**

When thousands of workers downed tools in February last year, to protest the death of Neil Aggett, the participation of a number of factories went largely unnoticed. Nine hundred workers at Distillers Corporation and SWF (Stellenbosch Farmers Winery) plants in Wadeville (Germiston) stopped work and 120 workers at Distillers Corporation in Durban also took action. These workers are members of the National Union of Wine, Spirits and Allied Workers (NUWSAW).

According to general-secretary Fay Mandy the union was launched in the Transvaal in June 1978. At that stage the moving forces were B.L. Krynauw (the former general secretary of the TUCSA-affiliated Garment Workers' Union) and Tom Mashinini who is employed by the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW). The union thus emerged from a TUCSA background. But from the start the organisers emphasised shop-floor organisation, according to Mandy.

In 1981 the union decided to register. Because of racial laws it registered two unions, one for 'coloureds' and one for 'Africans'. When the Act changed, 6 months later, the unions merged. 'But', says Mandy, 'we were one mixed union all along'.

Starting from the Transvaal, the union spread nationally. Today it boasts a paid-up membership of around 5000, an impressive 62% of the industry, and has seven branches nationally: Transvaal, Western Cape, Kimberly/Douglas, Bloemfontein, Natal, Port Elizabeth and East London/Kingwilliamstown. The union president is Mr. November Nkosi.

The union concentrates on the five large manufacturers - SFW, Distillers Corporation, Union Wine, Gilbeys and Douglas Green. Workers from the largest plants (up to 1000 workers) to the smallest depots (as few as 5 or 6) are organised.

The union's sphere of activity excludes the many liquor workers employed by farmers co-ops. Classified as agricultural workers, they are excluded from the Industrial Conciliation Act. Until recently the union has not organised these workers, but organisation has now begun at KWV.

The organising style and structures of NUWSAW give it much in common with the rest of the emerging union movement. According to Mandy, there is strong emphasis on the shop-stewards as the basis of the union. Shop-

stewards are expected to deal with all shop-floor matters that arise, and to have regular monthly meetings with management. The union is there to fall back on if additional assistance is needed. All shop-stewards are elected by the workforce and the union has negotiated, in all factories, a report-back period of one hour (paid) per month. This is to ensure that the shop-stewards don't lose touch with the general membership. 'The relationship between members and shop-stewards is very good' says Mandy.

Each factory is represented on the branch executive committee (BEC) which meets monthly. Each branch sends one or two delegates to form the National Executive Committee (NEC).

However the union also has a number of features indicative of its TUCSA-oriented origins. For example, the hiring and firing of union officials is handled at a national, and not a branch level. 'But organisers must be appointed,' says Mandy, 'on the recommendation of the branch concerned.'

Until a few years ago wages in the industry were set by the Wage Board. But since 1981 the union has negotiated on a national, industry-wide basis, with the employers association. This is probably the only example of such an agreement *outside of an Industrial Council*. 'There was talk of an IC in 1981,' says Mandy, 'but it didn't go far. The members generally didn't know much about Industrial Councils.'

At present NUWSAW meets the Wine & Spirit Manufacturers Association of South Africa annually for wage negotiations. At least one or two other meetings occur during the course of the year. These meetings are attended by workers representatives. Not every factory is represented directly since the union operates in 60 to 70 plants. 'What happens, for example, is that the three Transvaal plants of Distillers Corporation will be got together and the workers will be asked to send one representative,' says Mandy. The union ends up with a delegation of 12 workers together with the branch organisers and general secretary.

The annual wage negotiations take place in March. From the previous October all branches begin collecting proposals for a new agreement. The NEC collects all proposals, draws up a final proposal and sends this back to the branches for approval. 'We're trying to get away from the NEC doing everything,' according to Mandy, 'even though it's time-consuming. The agreement doesn't affect me, it affects the workers out there. With important decisions the workers must share responsibility.'

At present the basic minimum wage in the industry is R55.60 per week.

The latest round of wage talks has reached deadlock and a mediator has been appointed. The employers have offered 10% (i.e. below the inflation rate) whilst the union is demanding 25-30% increases.

NUWSAW describes itself as 'an independent thinking union'. At present it is unaffiliated to any larger federation. 'We first want to get our union firmly organised,' says Mandy. But the union appears to be watching developments closely. 'You have a broader platform with affiliation. What can a union of 9000, if we're organised fully, achieve on social and political questions? We cant sit on the sidelines forever.'

(Jeremy Baskin, Johannesburg, April 1983)