

NOT
Everything's OK

WORKERS DEMAND A LIVING WAGE



CCAWUSA
workers strike
back at
repression.

DEMAND A LIVING WAGE



Material used in this publication:
CWIU The Right to Strike
Sifuna Imali- The fight for a living wage
Trade Union Research Project Newsletters
Worker Newspapers

How companies are controlled

In a capitalist economy like South Africa, companies exist to make a profit. Who gets the profit depends on who controls the company. This control does not come from hard work on the shop floor, but through the money (capital) that is put into the company.

When a company needs to raise money, like when it starts or when it wants to open more factories or shops, or to buy goods or machinery, it does this in two ways:

- (i) it can borrow money, for example, by taking a loan from the bank; or
- (ii) it can sell shares in the company to other people or companies.

Shares represent small parts of the total value of the company and each share is worth the same amount of money. When the company sells shares for the first time, the shares have a fixed

price. By buying shares people and companies become part owners of that company whose shares they now own. They are called the shareholders of the company and they can claim part of the profits of that company. The people or companies who own the most shares, that is the people who had the most money or capital to put into the company, claim the biggest part of the profit and can control the companies policies.

We can see that in this way those people with the biggest amount of capital will get the biggest return for their money. The profit will not be divided according to who worked the hardest to make the profit for the company.

It is clear from this description that profits workers make through their sweat are, in a capitalist economy, directed away from the workers to the capitalists themselves.



workers already poor - get poorer

Shareholders already rich -
get richer



How shareholders get money from shares

How do shareholders get money from shares? Shareholders also control the companies policies through their control of the shares. Those capitalists with the most shares have the most votes at the shareholders meeting.

They can say what percentage of the profits must be paid out to them. Every year some of the profit of the company is given to shareholders for every share they have. This is called a dividend. This amount can differ from company to company and from year to year.

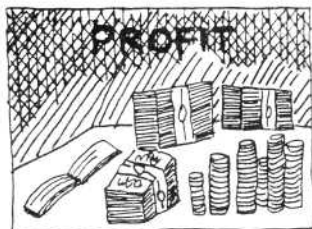
The value of each share can also increase from the time that it was first bought. If the company makes a good profit each year and grows bigger, other people will also be interested to have shares in the company. This means that the owners of such shares can make a price for their shares which will be higher than when they first bought the shares. In this way they can make more profit by selling their shares.

We can see that the hard work of workers can make two kinds of profit for capitalist shareholders:

- (i) through dividends paid to them
- (ii) by increasing the value of the share through their hard work.



Who gets OK Bazaars Profit ?



- * some workers in OK Bazaars earn less than R3 600 per year, yet the average income of each of OK Bazaars 6 executive directors is R138 500 per year.
- * directors earn 38 times more than the lowest paid worker
- * these executive directors each get another R2 000 per year for this position (this is not to mention all the other extras, persons in management positions get)
- * the executive directors of OK Bazaars also own shares in the company to the value of R1 916 186
- * the company has a policy which says that when the price of shares fall, directors will be protected from losing money. This can only mean that the labour of underpaid workers support them in this accumulation of wealth for themselves.
- * OK Bazaars has a policy which says that 60% of the profit after tax must be paid out to the shareholders in the form of a dividend. For the year ending 1986 this dividend was 17% higher than that paid out in the previous year.
- * This policy means that for the year ending 1986 nearly R8 million was paid out to shareholders. Of this money nearly R5.5 million went to SA Breweries or
- * for the same period profit after tax was R549 per employee. Of this money R329 per employee was paid to shareholders; SA Breweries took R231 per employee of this amount.

Who is OK Bazaars ?

- * OK Bazaars own 202 stores in South Africa
- * OK Bazaars employ 23 000 people
- * OK Bazaars make its money from selling food, clothes, furniture and houseware
- * the majority of OK Bazaars customers are from the lower income groups. This means that the small wages of workers in South Africa make part of the profit of OK Bazaars.
- * OK Bazaars retrenched 2 000 workers over the last two years
- * OK Bazaars opened 6 new stores in the last year
- * OK Bazaars borrowed R102,1 million to buy extra stock to help them if goods are more expensive in future
- * for the year ending 1986 OK Bazaars operating profit was R35.3 million.
- * for the same period they say their profit after tax was R 12.97 million
- * SA Breweries own 70.2% of the shares in OK Bazaars

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WORKERS DEMANDS

- * an increase of R160 per month, backdated to April 1986
- * a minimum wage of R450 per month
- * a 20% staff discount
- * women on maternity leave to get the same increase when they return to work
- * workers in the bantustans to get the same benefits
- * workers say no to R85 anniversary pay as an increase



THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

One of the first resolutions passed by COSATU at their first congress was on the right to strike. This is one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of the working class. This is the right of workers to withhold their labour which is necessary for the bosses to make their profits and for the capitalist system to continue.

This strike weapon has been used by

workers all over the world for more than 100 years. Naturally at first no bosses and their helpers in the government was prepared to recognise this right of workers. After years of struggle, of attacks against the working class and of political repression, workers in some countries have through their hard struggles won the right to strike.



In South Africa for example this right is limited by strict rules about when it is legal for workers to strike:

- * strikes in sympathy with other workers are sometimes not permitted
- * strict procedures and time limits are placed on workers. This makes it difficult to have a legal strike.
- * capitalist bosses can fire workers in non-legal strikes. They can sometimes sue trade unions for losses arising from strikes
- * some workers are not allowed to strike at all. They are workers in the so-called "essential services", like nurses, or workers in the railways and Escom



Workers rights in a legal strike

- * any worker in the factory or store where there is a dispute can join the strike. This is so even if she is a new member whose membership fees are not yet on stop order
- * protection from violence and intimidation by the police and the bosses
- * protection from dismissal. In some cases the bosses have dismissed workers on a legal strike. But, in most cases the workers have forced the bosses through their actions or through the courts to re-employ all the strikers. The best protection for workers is to fight for recognition agreements that protect the strikers
- * the right to monies due to them prior to the strike
- * protection from intimidation by management on return to work

COSATU RESOLUTION

2. RIGHT TO STRIKE

This federation noting:

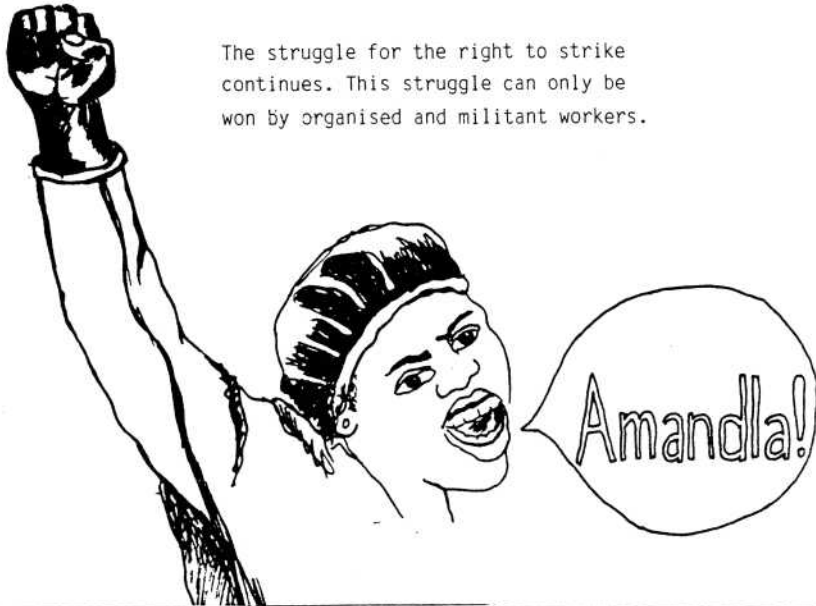
1. That the strike is a legitimate right and necessary weapon of the working class in their struggle against bad working conditions and low wages.
2. That the strike is internationally accepted as an essential element of collective bargaining.
3. That freedom of association, assembly and picketing for strike action are also fundamental rights, internationally, in industrial struggle.
4. That the infringement or curbing of these rights is detrimental to the social and economic interests of the workers.
5. That the right to strike is severely curtailed in SA.
6. That a strike involves a democratic form of struggle.
7. That picketing is an integral part of a strike and of morally persuading fellow workers not to break a strike.
8. That essential service workers are not allowed to take industrial action in pursuing their demands.

Therefore resolves:

1. To continue a relentless campaign which will allow workers full freedom of association, assembly and picketing for strike action. This requires that all forms of security legislation that deny these rights be removed.
2. To ensure that where workers have followed mutually agreed dispute procedures with employers, there will be full job security during such strikes. This requires that eviction from accommodation and other such measures be outlawed.
3. To campaign and respond vigorously against police and state intervention in strikes or industrial disputes.
4. To fight for the right of trade unions to establish strike funds.
5. To ensure that strikers are free to establish and control strike committees.
6. To fight for the removal of the designation of essential services and that all workers be allowed to share equal rights.

The bosses try many tricks to scare workers and their leaders to become strike breakers and to break the workers unity.

- * they dismiss some workers or all of them even where the strike is legal. They hope to scare workers in this way to go back to work.
- * they make their own rules of conduct during the strike. They will even call the police to help them enforce those rules.
- * they try to separate workers from their leaders. Sometimes after the strike management will refuse to let some workers come back.
- * they sometimes ask for help from the courts to stop the militant actions of workers.
- * where workers live on the company premises, they will often try to evict the strikers.
- * worker leaders are often detained by the police during strikes and management do not take a stand on this issue.
- * sometimes management will lock the strikers out of their work place. They hope this will stop the strikers from meeting and will break their unity. They also hope that the workers will not see the scabs or the strike breakers.
- * they plant their spies among the workers
- * because workers need money during strikes, the bosses hope to break the strike by giving more money to the scabs than the workers ever got.



The struggle for the right to strike continues. This struggle can only be won by organised and militant workers.

But workers have protected themselves from the attacks by the bosses and the their helpers. They have taken the bosses to court, they have organised sleep-ins, boycotts, solidarity action from other workers and in some cases co-operatives. ALL THE ADVANCES THAT WORKERS HAVE MADE CAME FROM THEIR UNITED AND MILITANT ACTION.



Workers Take Control

At Natal Die Castings in Pinetown the bosses dismissed 120 union members who were involved in a two day legal strike. The strike was over production long-service bonuses and travel allowances. The Industrial Court ordered the company to reinstate the striking workers. The court said that the workers must be reinstated from February 1986 and that they must receive 26 weeks back pay.

On 25 June MAWU members at BTR Dunlop in Durban went on a legal strike after a strike ballot. They rejected managements offer of an 11% increase for lowest paid workers and a 6% increase for highest paid workers. They said that this offer was below the inflation rate of 19%. MAWU wanted a 50c/hour increase for all the workers. This would bring the minimum wage to R3.00 per hour. MAWU dropped their demands for changes to overtime rates, long service, the shift system, and May Day as a paid holiday.

Workers picketed the main gate at the factory and prevented vehicles from entering or leaving. On 27 June BTR

got a temporary court order to stop union members from entering company premises without their permission.

MAWU said that the company was using the State of Emergency regulations to break the strike. They said that workers were forcibly removed from the company premises.

The bosses then offered a 50c across the board increase, but only if the union will extend this agreement beyond 12 months. MAWU rejected the offer. After one month the bosses increased their offer to 60c across the board over 12 months. Workers accepted this offer and went back to work. Their minimum wage was increased by their militant action from R116 per week to R143 per week.

This is how a member of MAWU describe their strike:

I think a sit-in is a very good weapon. Sit-in keeps the workers together. It makes workers feel strong. I remember last month we had a sit-in at Dunlop. The sit-in at Dunlop took one and a half weeks. We were singing and shouting. The bosses were worried because no-one was working. They were worried about their machines. They locked all the doors. They also hired the whites and indian security guards. In the main gate there were more than ten security guards.

Our families started to bring food.

When the bosses saw food coming in, they applied in the court for an interdict.



100 workers at HR Kilarney near Kemp-ton Park in the Transvaal stopped work, when management refused to negotiate with their shopstewards.

The bosses did not want to listen to MAWU who said short time is the answer, Instead the bosses wanted to retrench 20 workers.

On June 20 when workers came to work the management said that those who want to work must stand on one side.

Workers said that they will work if the bosses talk to their shop stewards.

The bosses replied that they were all fired. They also refused to talk to th the union's organiser.

After 11 days management saw how strong the workers were. They agreed that everyone would be taken back and also agreed not to retrench or introduce short time.



'A Strike-breaker is a traitor'

SIFUNA IMALI

THE FIGHT FOR A LIVING WAGE

To get the bosses to give more money is a very difficult thing.

Workers all over Soth Africa are struggling to make ends meet as such basic items as food, rent, and transport get more and more expensive.

The number of mouths to be fed from one wage is growing as more and more workers lose their jobs.

Many workers have been told that they must work harder for less pay. Even then some workers are still retrenched and bosses do not create new jobs.

We can see from this that workers wages are getting smaller and smaller as everything gets more expensive, They have to look after more people on one wage. And they must do more work for the same wage. For all these reasons workers are demanding a living wage. This means more money than the smallest amount needed just to keep alive.



COSATU RESOLUTION

5. NATIONAL MINIMUM LIVING WAGE

Seeing that:

The majority of workers in SA are earning starvation wages because of the present economic system; constantly rising prices (inflation) are making what little money workers have, worth less and less every day.

Employers in SA continue to make massive and completely unrealistic profits when compared with employers in other capitalist countries.

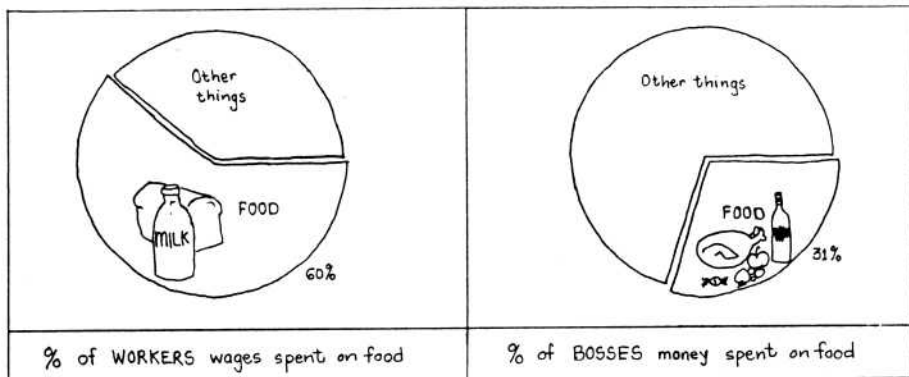
Many millions of workers do not have any minimum wage protection whatsoever.

The issue of a living wage is one of the strongest points for organising the unorganised.

We hereby resolve:

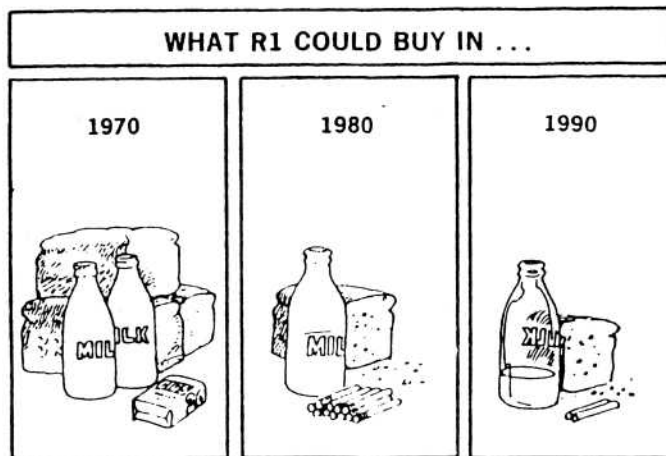
1. That the Central Executive Committee establish as soon as possible what workers regard as a minimum living wage.
2. Then initiate and conduct - in alliance with other progressive organisations and trade unions in the country - an ongoing national campaign for a legally enforced national minimum living wage for all workers in South Africa, by amongst other things fighting in every industry through worker action and negotiation for that minimum living wage to be paid by all employers.
3. Fight for this minimum living wage to be automatically linked to the rate of inflation.
4. Struggle for the abolition of GST on all essential items and worker control over all deductions like pensions and UIF, which are being financed by workers but used against workers by the racist and anti-worker government.
5. Fight to open all the books of every organised company so that workers can see exactly how the wealth they have produced is being wasted and misused by the employers' profit system, and on that basis can demand their full share of the wealth they have produced. Should the wealth not be there, then it will only prove the inefficiency of employer management and strengthen the case for worker control and management of production.

* between August 1985 and August 1986 food prices rose by 22%. It is more difficult for workers to pay these high prices than it is for the bosses. This is so because workers have to spend a bigger part of their wages per month on food than the bosses do.



* some universities try to work out what is the smallest amount of money that a family of six people will need to survive. This amount of money is often much smaller than workers know they need. This is so because the universities choose only certain kinds of food and household items to work out what this amount is; they do not really make an allowance for some extras that workers need or for more money for entertainment or for workers to improve their knowledge. The University of Port Elizabeth have worked out that the smallest amount of money that a family of 6 people need in Durban is R561.64 per month. This means a weekly wage of R130.52.

* the inflation rate for workers and their families was 19.8% in September this year.





A living wage is not only money. Workers all over South Africa say that money alone is not enough. They must fight for a better Quality of life. Workers have the right to be rewarded for the kind of work they do. Workers also need more time to spend with their families. Jobs must be created to fight unemployment. And workers who are working must be protected against unemployment.

Many workers and their organisations are saying:

- * we want a 40 hour week
- * no to overtime
- * May Day, 16 June and Sharpeville Day as paid holidays

- * anniversary bonuses are a right and not a gift from management. They are separate issues from regular wage increases.
- * because shift work upsets family life, is unhealthy and cause tension and high blood pressure, we demand a shift allowance, that pays an equal amount to all workers.
- * women must get paid maternity leave with jobs guaranteed and time off to visit clinics
- * control over all deductions from wages



