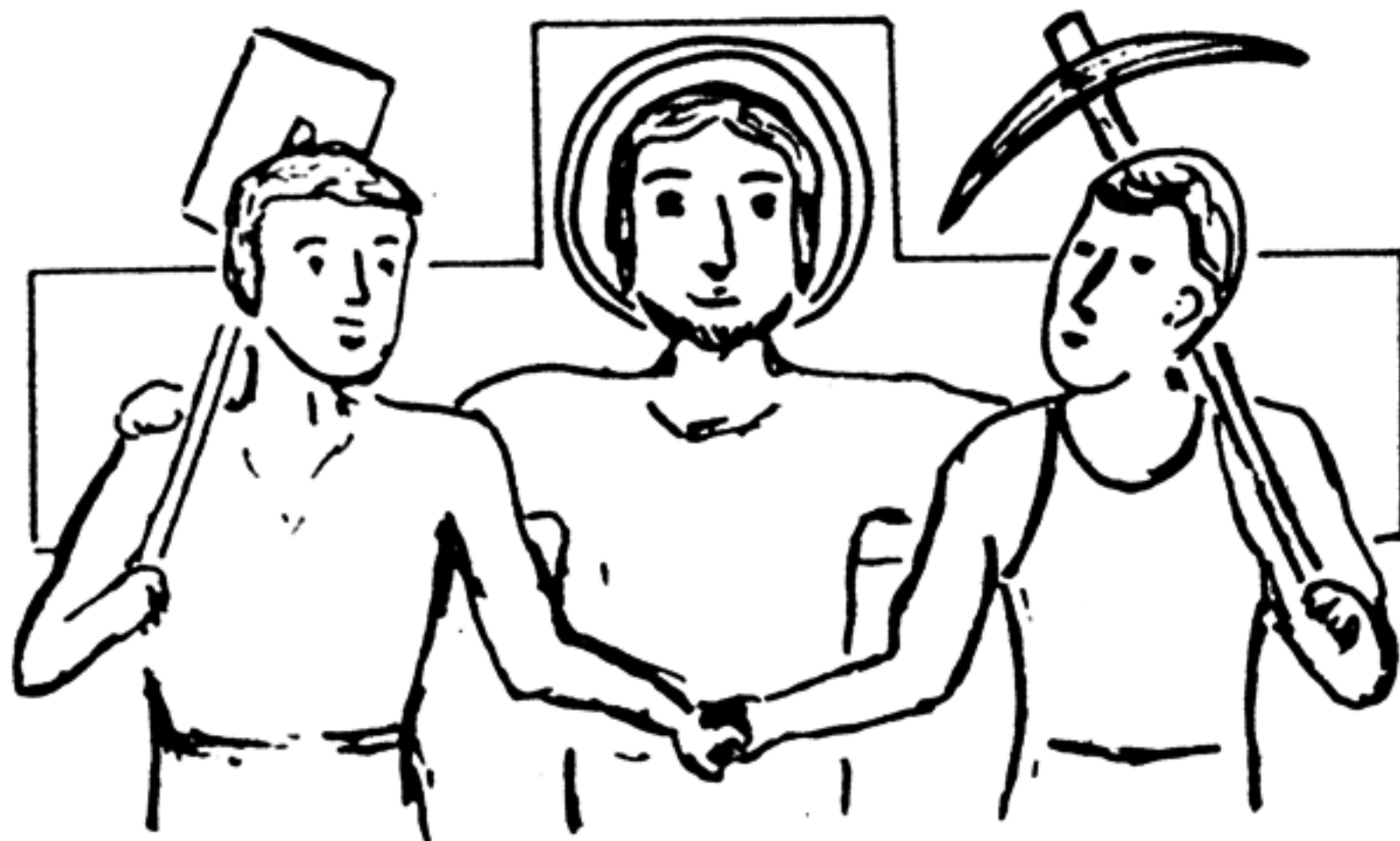


fattis and monis

# STRIKE



"For the three other crimes, the four crimes, of Israel  
I have made my decree and will not relent!  
because they have sold the virtuous man for silver  
and the poor man for a pair of sandals,  
because they trample on the heads of ordinary people  
and push the poor out of their path, ...  
because they stretch themselves out by the side of every altar  
on clothes acquired as pledges,  
and drink the wine of the people they have fined  
in the house of their God ..."

AMOS 11 vs 6 - 8.

1979-07

# THE STRIKE

March 1979 : The workers decided that the Food and Canning Workers' Union should press for higher wages and better conditions. The starting wages for women were R17 odd, for men R19 a week. Many of the workers had long service. One had worked for 32 years, yet earned only R31 a week. A petition, signed by African and Coloured workers, was drawn up, authorising the Union to write a letter of demand and to negotiate on behalf of the workers. A letter was sent, asking for R40 a week and improved conditions.

12 April : Having received no reply to their letter, the Union applied to the Minister of Labour for the appointment of a Conciliation Board. This Board, even though it could officially only represent Coloureds, would force the employer to meet with the Union and listen to the grievances of the workers.

19 April : The manager told workers to choose between the Union and the Liaison Committee, which he had recently set up. The workers had refused to serve on this Committee, because they felt that it was only intended to undermine the Union and they could be victimised.

One week before the strike, the manager warned workers that their jobs would be endangered if they chose the Union. The Union secretary phoned Mr. P. Moni, the Director of the Company in Johannesburg, about this threat. Mr. P. Moni assured the secretary that employers would not be affected.

23 April : 5 Coloured workers were fired. All were Union members and were thus active in organizing the petition. No reasons were given.

24 April : The manager refused to speak to the other workers and notified the Department of Labour. 5 Coloured workers insisted on knowing the reasons for the dismissal of the other 5 workers and were dismissed on the spot. The Union then met with the management, who still refused to discuss the dismissals. (The management subsequently claimed, a month later, that the dismissals were due to retrenchment following mechanisation and re-organisation).

25 April : All the workers, African and Coloureds together, asked to see the Manager. The Manager came, but again refused to discuss anything with them. Again the Department of Labour was summoned, but the workers told them that they wanted to deal with their boss directly. The Department also wanted to separate them, Coloureds and Africans. The workers would not allow this. The Manager still refused to speak to the workers and finally told them to get out, and collect their pay on Friday. The workers left and went straight to their Union offices. They were 88 in all.

The factory began to employ scab labour to replace the dismissed workers. Both the local Management and the Head Office refused to discuss with the Union a solution to the dismissals. The union declared a dispute in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Mr. Peter Moni said that they had broken off negotiations because "they wanted to represent blacks and so far the law does not allow for that". When told that the law does not prohibit it, Moni said, "there is little interest in a union on the part of our black workers ... Black's wages are improving faster than that of the Coloured people. It just doesn't make sense for them to have gone out in support of the Coloureds."

To the workers, it made sense. The striking Black workers, all on contract from the homeland, were in a vulnerable position. They were soon informed that by going on strike they had broken their contracts, and faced the prospect of forced removal to their "homeland". This was a far greater consequence than that faced by the Coloured workers, a black worker, who had worked for the company for 8 years, replied:

"But what could we do? We all work here"



**May :** Various organisations and persons came out in support of the workers and called for a boycott of Fattis and Monis products. Several organisations interviewed Fattis and Monis management to try and resolve the dispute. Amongst them were the Women for Peace Movement, The Institute of Race Relations and Western Cape Treaders Association. However, Fattis and Monis would still not speak directly with the Union or the workers.

At present the workers are still meeting regularly and being paid R15 a week out of Union funds.

### What are the workers' demands?

THE WORKERS WANT THEIR OLD JOBS BACK, WHICH THEY HAD FOR MANY YEARS. IF THEY ARE TO BE RE-EMPLOYED AT SUBSIDIARIES THE UNITY WOULD BE BROKEN, THERE WOULD BE NO UNION TO PROTECT THEM AGAINST BEING DISMISSED, FOR THE SLIGHTEST MISTAKE.



### Labour relations in general.

In the free enterprise system, there is a division of labour in the factory between those who control the plant and labour, and those who sell their labour power. There is inherent conflict of interest between employer and workers because what is a wage for the worker is a cost for the employer. The goal of the employer is to maximize profits. The worker relies entirely on his wage and has no other income to secure what he needs to live and feed his family. It is thus important that both parties have equal power of negotiation in order to represent their interests.

In Industrial society today, with its ever increasing division of labour, workers' skills are no longer essential and so, the worker cannot use his skill as a tool to negotiate with the Manager in order to secure his position. The only way, then, the worker can have some power in the work-place, is in his ability to come together with his fellow workers. Pope Paul IV, addressing himself to social problems in his encyclical Gaudium et Spes remarks that-

"One fundamental human right that workers have is that of freely setting up unions which can genuinely represent them and contribute to a proper organizing of economic life; they have also the right to participate freely in union business, without fear of victimization.

When social-economic conflict arises the aim should be to settle it peacefully. But though negotiation should come first, strikes can remain a necessary last resort, in present conditions, for protecting rights and realizing the rightful demands of labour. As soon as possible, however, ways and means should be sought to resume negotiations and bring about reconciliation." (Para 68)

In South Africa, while the right to form a union for whites is recognised by the law, it is not for blacks. Therefore blacks are in a very vulnerable position when they disagree with their conditions.

The strike, itself, is an economic act, not a political act. It is not an assault on the employer but a simple withdrawal of labour. If the right to equal negotiation is denied, if the Trade Unions and the right to strike is not provided for by law, conflict could develop into violence.

Workers on strike, lose all their pay and because black workers in this country live so close and sometimes beneath the Poverty Datum Line, it is a drastic course of action.



On the 14th of July, one of the workers lost his 3 month old daughter. He had delayed sending her to the doctor because he had so little money and refused to go to the factory to collect his pay. To collect pay would mean workers were no longer on Fattis and Monis books and that their passes would be endorsed, and they would be sent back to the homeland and face slow starvation.

The Fattis and Monis workers, after numerous attempts to negotiate with the management have failed, have decided to go on strike. This means enormous hardship for them. It also means that something is drastically wrong with their working conditions.



### Why must we, as Christians, respond?

The Second Vatican Council confirmed that the Church's task is to 'carry forward the work of Christ Himself, and Christ entered this world ... to serve and not to be served' (GS,3). It then recognised God's will 'that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood'. (GS,24) And shortly thereafter, the Council firmly announced that -

'everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus'. (GS,27)



# what can we do ?

Show our support for the workers by joining in the nation-wide boycott of Fattis & Monis products. We feel boycotting is necessary because it is the only means by which Fattis and Monis Management may be encouraged to negotiate with the workers, as quickly as possible.

### FATTIS AND MONIS PRODUCE THE FOLLOWING :-

Record flour products

Fattis and Monis  
ice cream cones  
cake cups  
macaroni  
spaghetti  
large and small shells  
ribbon noodles

Also noodles and spaghetti under the following name brands:

Pot o Gold  
Princess  
Checkers  
Roma

Philadelphia flour

Koeberg Mille pick mealie meal

In addition, Fattis and Monis own certain bakeries - Manna Bakery in Randburg and Eleys Bakery in Benoni.

- the union is in desperate need of funds

Money can be sent to:

COMMUNITY ACTION SUPPORT COMMITTEE  
P.O. BOX 3605  
JOHANNESBURG. 2000.

we realise that Fattis and Monis is not an isolated incident, but represents the situation of most workers in South Africa. We can alert ourselves to their conditions and respond accordingly.