

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



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FOSATU and other unions put their muscle behind a country-wide consumer boycott

BOYCOTT

FOSATU together with the Food and Canning Workers Union, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union, the General Workers Union, the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association and the National Union of Mineworkers have decided to put their weight behind a national consumer boycott in protest at the declaration of a State of Emergency.

And, at a meeting at Wilgespruit near Johannesburg on August 17, the unions set up a national committee to monitor the progress of the boycott on a month by month basis.

The national boycott of shops in the central business districts is in support of four demands:

- the lifting of the State of Emergency.
- the removal of the police and the army from the townships.
- the release of all detainees.
- political rights for all South Africa's people.

Should none of these demands be met, the unions have committed themselves to taking stronger action.

Sporadic boycotts have already begun in a number of areas, however the decision by these strongly-organised unions to involve themselves will spread the consumer boycott to all of South Africa's major towns and cities.

A resolution taken at the meeting warned that the unions would take solidarity action against any employer who dismissed or retrenched workers, particularly CCAWUSA members, because of the boycott.

Miners' strike

At the Wilgespruit meeting the unions expressed 'strong support' for the miners' struggle for a living wage and for their planned strike due to start on August 25.

Union delegates were horrified to learn of the appalling minimum wages being paid on the mines — R136 per month for surface workers and R166 for underground workers (see article on page 10).

The unions said that the National Union of Mineworkers' demand for a 22 percent increase in the light of these wages was 'entirely reasonable'.

They condemned the Chamber of Mines' stubbornness in not accepting this demand.

The unions also expressed concern at the rumours that some mining houses were building up weaponry in preparation for the strike.

At the meeting the unions committed themselves to taking solidarity action in support of the NUM strike.

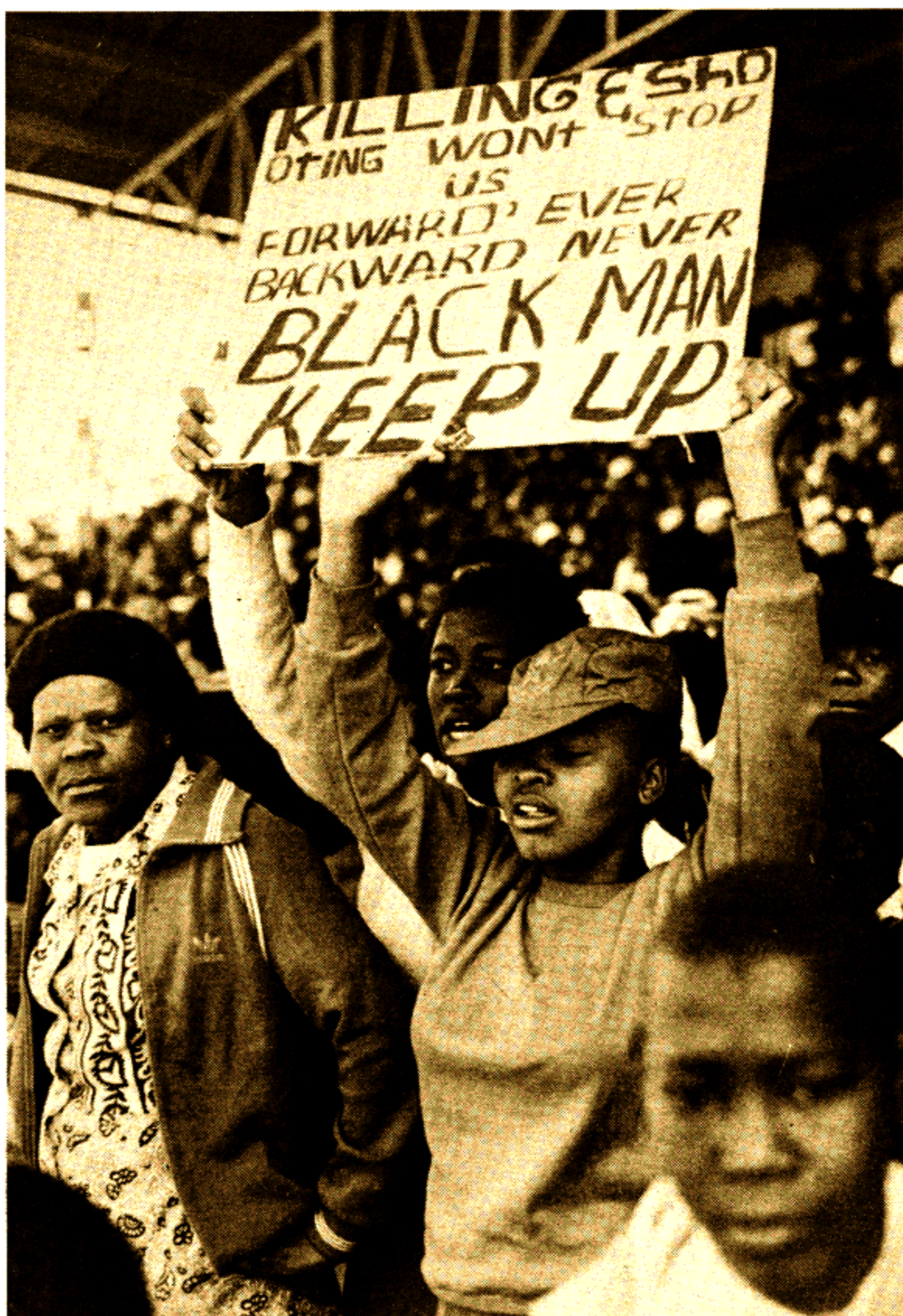
Unity

Meanwhile, a final date has been set for the Inaugural Congress of the new super federation. It is November 30-December 1.

At a recent unity meeting at least 25 unions said they would present paid-up membership figures and their constitutions to a credentials committee in preparation for the launching congress.

The total membership of the new federation could well be in the region of 400 000.

The credentials committee will also assist unions in taking steps towards merging with other unions in the same industrial sector so that in the near future there will be only one union for each sector.



The message is clear, but will anyone listen to it? — an NUTW member waves a placard at the KwaThema funeral

Mass detentions, now a curfew

Over 1 500 detained since July 20

USING the special powers granted to it by the declaration of a State of Emergency, the South African Police has declared a curfew in a number of Eastern Cape townships.

The police is also attempting to crack the school boycotts, which in some areas have been on the go since October last year, by bringing in special measures which allow it to control school pupils. Special 'control over petrol' regulations are also being enforced.

In terms of the emergency orders, the 10 pm to 4 am curfew applies to eleven townships around Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Fort Beaufort. These are: New Brighton, Kwazakele, Zwide, Walmer, KwaNobuhle, Kabah, Langa, Fingodorp, Tanti, Makannaskop and Joza.

Although, this is the first time that a curfew has been legally declared, workers in many areas affected by the State of Emergency have reported that an informal curfew has existed in the townships since July 20.

At a Special Central Committee meeting held on August 3, regional representatives from the Eastern Cape and the

Transvaal said that groups of night-shift workers returning home were being attacked by police.

Because of this, many factories in the Eastern Cape have demanded that management adjust the shifts. In one company where this has been successful, day-shift workers are allowed to leave before 6 pm and the night-shift workers now arrive at that time.

In terms of the new orders controlling school boycotts, students may not leave their classrooms 'unless it is during a prescribed break, or except for the purposes of visiting the dressing room or to change classes'.

And a virtual 'street curfew' also applies to 'registered pupils' who do not attend classes — a special law virtually bans them from leaving their homes.

Students are also not allowed to take part in any activity at a school which is not supervised by a teacher and which does not have a 'direct bearing' on normal school activities. Only students and staff are allowed on the school's premises.

These school boycott orders apply in the 11 Eastern Cape townships, in six South Western Districts areas, 13 East Rand townships and seven on the West Rand.

Once again, Eastern Cape workers reported that the police were taking action against students before these new orders were announced.

They said that it had been announced in the townships that the police expected students to be in the class rooms between 8 am and 2 pm and at night to be at home.

The special 'control over petrol' now in force on the West Rand and in the South Western Districts bans the possession of petrol in any container 'excluding the petrol tank of a motor vehicle'.

And 'no person shall siphon petrol tank from the petrol tank of a motor vehicle into a container of whatever nature' except with the written permission of a member of the security forces.

These 'control over petrol' measures have obviously been introduced in an attempt to stop petrol being used for 'acts of violence'.

ONE of the major reasons for the State President, P W Botha, declaring a State of Emergency in 36 magisterial districts was to justify the mass detentions of some 1 500 people since July 20.

The government already have the powers to detain people without reason under the Internal Security Act, however the detention of so many people would have provoked a more widespread condemnation both internationally and locally than has been seen thus far.

Most conservative governments and their supporters believe that the State of Emergency is necessary in order to 'normalise' the situation in this country's townships. The detentions are part of this process.

Few people are able to see that the iron fist of repression is no solution to the growing dissatisfaction with the government's fake reforms.

Those detained have been mainly from civic associations, student and youth organisations, political organisations and trade unions.

There are a number of FOSATU organisers, shop stewards and members among those who have been detained. These are: James Tamboer (full time shop steward at General Motors); Patrick Williams (Ford full time shop steward); Wilson Jonas (Ford full time shop steward); Molefe Nhlapo (SFAWU organiser); Dan Thulare (SA Breweries shop steward); Isaac Kgasago (Jabula Foods shop steward);

Siyolo Mashiqana (CWIU shop steward); Isaac Setoave (SFAWU member); L Mawela (CWIU shop steward); J Leshodi (SFAWU shop steward); and S Mathlaika (retrenched MAWU member from Siemens). Some of these have been released.

Another 'advantage' of the State of Emergency has been that now any member of the security forces (army or police) can detain someone for at least 14 days without a warrant. This 14 days can be extended by the Minister of Law and Order.

Under the Internal Security Act a person could only be detained after a warrant had been signed by a high ranking police officer.

Also, in terms of the Emergency regulations, detainees have even fewer rights than normal detainees.

Even whistling and singing are an offence under these regulations and can be punished by either forced labour duties, a fine, corporal punishment, or the taking away of one or more meals.

The State of Emergency also makes it possible for the security forces to restrict what is printed in the press about the detentions. It is a criminal offence to report the detention of anyone held without the permission of the Minister.

Newspapers have been forced to rely on the lists of detainees being handed out by the police. There is no knowing whether the list contains the names of all the detainees.

Botha's new 'weapon'

PRESIDENT P W Botha has discovered a new weapon in his attempts to combat the increasing international pressure for economic sanctions against South Africa.

He has threatened to send home all the migrant workers from neighbouring states and cut all economic ties with these countries.

It is highly unlikely that President Botha would put this threat into action but if he did so, the worst hit industry would be the mines.

The mines employ nearly

200 000 foreign workers — 40 percent of its workforce. Nearly half of these are from Lesotho and the rest are from Mocambique, Botswana, Malawi and Swaziland.

Many of families in these countries depend upon the wages sent home by migrant workers for their very survival. Last year the mines sent R434 million in wages back to the home countries of foreign workers.

The declaration of the State of Emergency and the mass detentions has led to increased

pressure being brought to bear on overseas governments to take some form of economic action against South Africa.

Since November last year in the United States of America thousands of people, including huge numbers of union members, have been demonstrating against apartheid.

Recently, the biggest anti-apartheid demonstration yet held took place in Washington when thousands of people carrying 50 black cardboard coffins in a symbolic funeral procession marched to the State Department.

30 000 in KwaThema funeral march



Moses Mayekiso

FIFTEEN coffins were carried in a mass procession of over 30 000 people to the graveyard in the Springs township of KwaThema on July 23. This was the first funeral to be held after the State of Emergency had been declared. Most of people wanting to attend the funeral must have been wondering whether the police would intervene using the new powers they now had under the Emergency regulations. At 10 am, when it was scheduled to start, only a handful of people were present. But, as the coffins began to arrive the KwaThema stadium quickly filled up. Hundreds of workers obviously took time off work to attend, judging from the large number of people wearing FOSATU union T shirts. Young men and women in union T shirts stood guard alongside the 15 coffins with fists raised. In one of the coffins was Metal

and Allied Workers Union member Elias Negoase who was shot dead by police on his way home from visiting a friend. Everyone from the youngest to the oldest fervently sang freedom songs while they waited for the speeches to begin. MAWU organiser, Moses Mayekiso told the crowd, 'We can see that freedom is near. You must unite. You must not be scared.' Bishop Desmond Tutu, Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, concluded the funeral by leading the mourners in a mass recital. 'We dedicate ourselves anew to the struggle for freedom for all of us, black and white.' It was only as the marchers drew nearer to the graveyard that the police presence became more obvious. About 20 Casspirs were parked nearby and police watched the proceedings through binoculars.



Flashback: The 1980 Frame strikes

Long bitter struggle at Frame has ended

THE longest recognition struggle in South African labour history has come to an end.

Nearly 2 000 National Union of Textile Worker members at the giant Frametex mill, the heart of the Frame complex at New Germany near Pinetown, now have the right to be represented by their union. A right which they have been fighting for for over ten years.

Way back in 1973 after the strikes at the New Germany mills, Frametex workers decided to form NUTW.

At that time nobody would have dreamed that they would succeed in their struggle.

Workers determined

The full might of the government was set against them. The police violently smashed strikes, arrested workers and detained union leaders.

And their employer, Frame, dealt only with liaison committees which were set up in each mill. The company was adamant that it would not accept a union at any cost.

The struggle at Frame quickly became a symbol of workers' determination to win the right to be represented by a union of their choice.

In 1980, the struggle took a new turn after TUCSA's Textile Workers Industrial Union changed its constitution in order to admit black workers.

Frame decided to recognise this union at the smaller mills in the New Germany complex.

But, in a court case in 1983, Frame was blocked by NUTW from recognising the TUCSA union at the Frametex mill. With a workforce of over 3 000, Frametex is the largest mill and has always been the stronghold of the NUTW.

The company attempted to justify its refusal to recognise NUTW by arguing that it would only recognise one union in the entire complex — that union was TWIU.

After two years of technical objections, Frame and NUTW began settlement negotiations earlier this year. These talks have led to a full recognition agreement being signed.

And an independent audit of union members at the New Germany mills was held in June.

Frametex workers for the first time in the history of the company were given an opportunity to prove what they had

always known — that they wanted to be represented by NUTW.

Close to two-thirds of the workers at this mill declared that they wanted to be paying members of the union.

In terms of the settlement agreement, NUTW will get stop order rights, shop stewards, the right to participate in grievance and disciplinary procedures and various other factory rights exclusively at Frametex.

Bargaining will take place jointly with TWIU for the complex as a whole except if that union drops below 20 percent membership.

Another major aspect covered by the agreement is retrenchment.

Up to now the policy on retrenchment, which was accepted by the TWIU, has allowed the company to select workers for retrenchment on the basis of company competency tests.

Workers were stripped of their seniority if transferred to another department and the policy limited the severance pay to about one-third of a week's pay for each year of service.

This retrenchment policy has been the subject of many court cases between the NUTW and Frame, where the company has

vigorously defending its right to retrench in accordance with these procedures.

Although, the cases demanding reinstatement of previously retrenched workers are still continuing, the new recognition agreement provides for a new retrenchment policy.

In terms of which, the company agrees that retrenchment must either be voluntary or in accordance with the principle of Last In First Out.

Severance pay will be increased to a week's pay per year of service. Also, workers who are transferred because of redundancy cannot have their wages cut for 12 weeks even if they are doing the work of a lower grade.

Commenting on the agreement, an NUTW spokesperson said 'We really sweated for this breakthrough. It opens the way for thousands of NUTW members in Frame factories in Natal and the Cape.'

'In the past we haven't seen much cooperation from the Frame Group but its attitude to NUTW has definitely been changing since settlement talks started outside the court doors.'

'With strong disciplined organisation, we are confident we will gain recognition in several more Frame mills over the next year,' he added.

Ladysmith too!

Meanwhile, Frame workers in Ladysmith are rapidly following on the heels of the Frametex workers.

Some 2 000 workers are now members of NUTW — about 80 percent of the mill's workforce.

No doubt they will be the second Frame mill to march to the company's door and demand recognition of NUTW.



An elated Frame worker

THE All Blacks rugby tour was called off in July just a week before the team was due to leave New Zealand. It was determined protest and resistance to the tour by people here and overseas which led to the cancellation.

Particularly significant was the downing of tools by 3 000 National Automobile and Allied Workers Union members at Volkswagen's Uitenhage plant when they learnt that the company was preparing courtesy kombis for the tour.

At the risk of losing their jobs, given the present recession, workers took a stand against something which they believed was clearly not in their interests.

Les Kettledas, NAAWU Eastern Cape regional secretary, said at the time that NAAWU members were protesting at the building of the buses for a privileged minority while their townships burned.

And Joe Foster general secretary of FOSATU said the action of the 3 000 was in line with FOSATU's stand on the tour.

'We took a decision at our last Central Committee to support all those who are against

this tour.'

He said FOSATU had sent a telegram to the New Zealand union federation expressing its opposition to the tour and had received a reply saying that the New Zealand body would do all it could to prevent the tour taking place.

For the NAAWU members at VW it was a long bitter struggle to stop the company from providing the courtesy kombis.

Suspicious

Shop stewards from the paint shop first reported their suspicions about the kombis on July 5. It had come to their notice that kombis painted black with silver stripes were being built.

This created suspicion among workers who knew the All Blacks' colours. The full time shop stewards contacted management to find out why the kombis were being built.

On July 9 shop stewards learnt that another two kombis in Springbok colours had been built. It became clear to paint shop and assembly line workers what the company was up to.

By this time eight kombis had been built with 'All Blacks Tour 1985' painted on them.

Another two were still on the production line.

The labour relations manager was asked to meet with all shop stewards to discuss the issue.

At the meeting shop stewards were told that kombis were not selling well on the market. Management said they thought it was a good opportunity to advertise and that it was the cheapest form of advertising as it would not cost them a cent.

But workers did not see why they should contribute their labour to building these kombis.

They felt that the South African government should solve the internal problems which affect the majority of the oppressed without buying the support of the outside world at the expense of the oppressed masses.

Plant closed

Management said that top management had to be contacted to make a decision about the kombis. In the meantime they decided to close the plant 'as workers had become very emotional about the issue'.

Workers calculated that 24 kombis were to be built and that this would cost thousands of rands.

They felt management should rather put that money into workers' pay packets and not spend it on kombis built by their sweat.

They demanded that the eight kombis that had already been built, and were parked in the shipping yard, be brought to the main plant. These, they said, should remain there for everyone to see until the All Blacks tour had ended.

Tempers fly

Another round of discussions between the NAAWU shop stewards and management took place but no compromise could be reached and tempers began to get high.

That meeting ended with an agreement that the kombis would not be shipped out as long as negotiations were in progress.

When workers heard this the next day, July 11, they said that they could not believe management and that they would not start work until the kombis were parked on the

company premises.

At a further meeting, the VW finance director gave a long presentation showing the losses of the company and the drop in sales of VW kombis.

Tempers again became very high. The only guarantee management gave was to say they would give the keys of the kombis to the shop stewards. They said they were not prepared to bring the kombis back to the main plant because they feared they would be damaged.

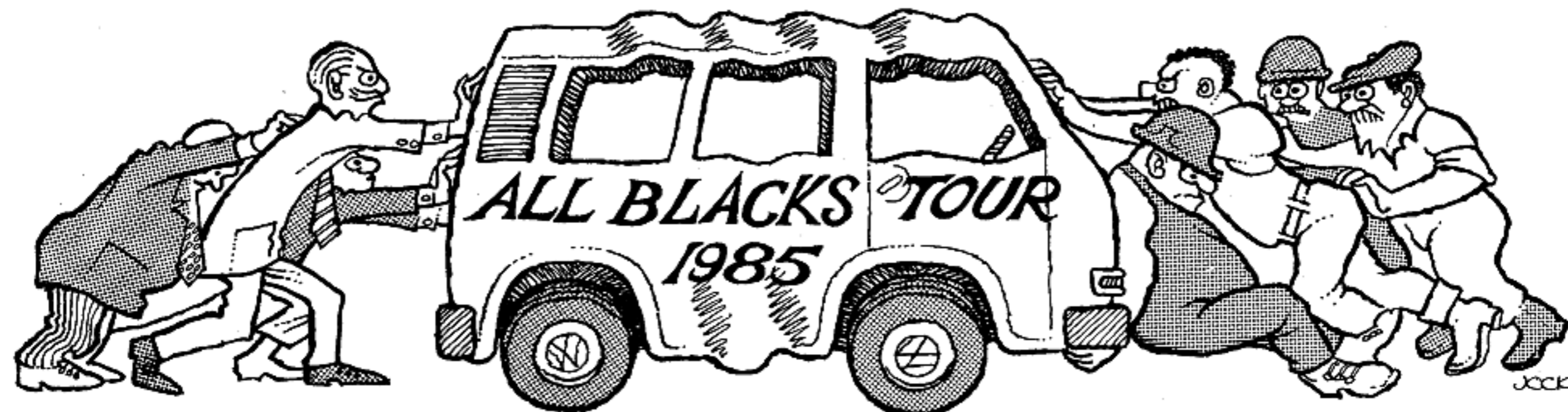
During the report back, workers told shop stewards to go to the shipping yard to check whether the kombis were still parked there. The shop stewards were told to monitor them on a daily basis until the tour was over.

On Monday July 15 management announced that the tour had been called off.

Workers decided to return to work on July 16. They demanded that all the kombis either be repainted or that the emblems be removed from them and they then be sold on the market.

Management agreed to remove the emblems and more kombis will be now produced in the same colours and then sold.

Tussle at VW over tour kombis



Rowen's strike clause

JACOBS motor component manufacturers, Rowen, and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union have signed a unique strike agreement.

The strike agreement says that in the case of an 'authorised strike' the company agrees not to dismiss any strikers as long as the strike does not last longer than four weeks (20 working days).

An authorised strike can be called by the union after all the procedures laid down in the recognition agreement have been followed.

The strike agreement goes some of the way in providing protection to workers who have followed the lengthy dispute procedures before taking any action.

As very few strikes last long-

er than four weeks in this country, this is the nearest South African workers have got to achieving the right to strike.

The right to strike, as it is practised in Britain, prevents the company from firing strikers no matter how long their stoppage lasts.

However, in South Africa the common practice is for the company to immediately fire strikers whether they followed the lengthy dispute procedures or not.

NAAWU organiser, Edwin Maepe said the agreement 'recognises strike action as a normal part of industrial relations'.

'Until employers recognise the strike as a legitimate option for workers, industrial relations in this country will be doomed to chaos,' he added.

Paid May Day won in Natal

ANOTHER two companies organised by FOSATU affiliated unions have won May Day as a paid public holiday.

In 1983 FOSATU unions and other independent unions began a campaign to revive May Day in South Africa.

A major part of this campaign has been to negotiate May 1 as a paid public holiday so that workers can fully celebrate this international workers' day.

Since then May Day has fea-

tured as one of the demands put forward by the unions during the annual wage negotiations at both factory and industrial council levels.

In 1984 Pilkington Glass in Port Elizabeth became the first factory to get May Day as a paid holiday.

Now recently, two Natal firms — Wayne Rubber and Van Leer — have agreed to give their workers the day off on May 1 and to pay them their full wages except when May Day falls on a weekend.

Pension money needed by workers

WORKERS at Volkswagen in Uitenhage have been working short-time since October 1982. Increasingly they have found it difficult to meet their living costs.

The situation has become so bad that many can no longer afford to pay the debts they have at various shops. But they have been forced to pay their debts by the shops' lawyers.

Workers have now called for withdrawal from the company pension fund and for their pension money to be paid out to them. They went on strike over the issue but returned to work when the company agreed to pay out their pensions on

August 30.

In a letter to VW management the workers set out their position clearly:

'Our union does not accept that due to the unwillingness of the company to meet the workers' demands, such as improved lay off benefits, severance pay and a decent living wage, workers should be forced to resort to the withdrawal of their pension benefits.'

'However, due to the immediate needs of the workers resulting from loss of earnings due to the short hours of work, pressure from the shops to which they owe money, and the bad economic situation which pre-

vails, the union has no option but to support the withdrawal of pension benefits on an optional basis.'

In the letter the VW workers criticised the company for not considering the workers' financial problems when it was approached for financial assistance.

The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union has called for discussions with management on the long term objectives of the pension scheme — whether the present one should be kept or another one which better suits the needs of workers should be opted for.

Dock workers blockade S A cargo

SOUTHAMPTON dock workers belonging to Britain's Transport and General Workers Union on Thursday July 31 refused to load a computer controlled milling machine ordered by a South African company.

The workers believe the milling machine is intended for the Atlas aircraft company, and so is a breach of the United Nations' arms embargo which bans the selling of military equipment to South Africa.

Berox Machine Tool, manufacturers of the machine, said it did not fall within the scope of the United Nations' arms embargo regulations.

But the Anti Apartheid

Movement, which alerted the dockers, says the machine will be used to maintain fighter aircraft although it was consigned to the Johannesburg-based company, Fritz Wallaberger Machinery.

Britain's Guardian newspaper reported that it had documents which showed that Atlas was the real buyer and that Fritz Wallaberger Machinery was getting a 10 percent commission for handling the deal. The milling machine is worth about R89 000.

The British Department of Trade and Industries and the Department of Customs are in-

vestigating the allegations but workers have warned that they will not necessarily accept a decision clearing the machine for export.

Meanwhile, the Safmarine container SA Sederberg has left Southampton without the milling machine.

In another action by dockers, Australian workers at Sydney harbour have refused to handle South African cargo aboard the Saffocean container ship, Mildura.

The dockers refused to handle the cargo as a protest against the current State of Emergency and the mass detentions.

Durban's bread strike

HUDDLED in cardboard boxes to keep out the cold, some 800 workers at the B B Bread Bakery in Durban's Sydney Road kept up their night-long vigil to prevent the company sneaking in scabs.

Their week-long occupation of the biggest bakery in the area effectively cut off the supply of standard bread loaves to Durban.

The B B Bread workers, together with about 1 200 workers at six other bakeries, went on strike on July 22 in support of their demand for a living wage.

The bread strikers were demanding an across-the-board increase of R23. However, their employers were only prepared to offer a R11,40 weekly increase.

For the first time, the power of worker strike action was brought home to every Durban household.

The only bread available for the duration of the two-week strike was that baked by the small bakeries in the major supermarkets. And this was not enough!

Lengthy bread queues became a common sight in most supermarkets and by lunchtime most of the bread and rolls had been snapped up by shoppers.

Some traders even trucked in loaves from as far as Johannesburg and sold the standard bread at prices way above those laid down by the government.irate shoppers said they were paying as much as R1,10 for white and 90c for brown loaves.

But, in the local townships and hostels, where the strikers had managed to get support for their struggle, the standard loaves of bread were boycotted.

One unfortunate hostel dweller made the mistake of buying a rare standard loaf. Discovered by fellow workers on his way home, the loaf was taken from him and then was stamped on.

At the outset, the four unions involved in the Durban/Tongaat bakeries — the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (FOSATU), the Food and Beverage Workers Union (CUSA), the Black Allied Workers Union and the Natal Baking Industry's Employees Union — presented a united front against the employers.

At the industry's industrial council, the unions agreed to put forward joint demands and when the wage talks deadlocked they jointly decided to call a strike ballot in which 70 percent of the workers voted for strike action.

A HAUNTING voice singing 'Zithulele Mama, Noma sengifile ngiyobe ngifele lona, Izwe lakithi, Izwe leSouth Africa' (Don't cry Mama, even if I am dead, I would have died for my land, the land of South Africa) immediately strikes home the horrific reality of this country.

Everyday people are being killed in the townships — close on 500 in the last 10 months. But, had the new FOSATU record just carried that song which is sung by the Simba Quix Choir, it would not have presented the whole picture.

Workers in South Africa have begun to organise and in this there is hope, as the K Team from Kelloggs sings, 'But now we have a representative.



Clover Dairy's workers and the B B Bread strikers meet at the factory gates

But cracks in this unity began to appear when three of the unions signed an agreement with the employers to vacate the premises when the strike began.

Only SFAWU members, at B B Bread and at Blue Ribbon, occupied the two bakeries to prevent the employers bringing in scabs to break the strike.

It was only after the employers took Supreme Court action at the end of the first week that the workers marched out of the premises.

53-year-old, Mkhulumiseni Zulu, who has worked at B B Bread for 33 years left the bakery only once during their week-long occupation and that was to give his family some

money.

'I was terribly sick because of the cold, but I was determined to stay inside as long as I could. I was fighting for the survival of my family,' he told FOSATU Worker News.

In an interview with FOSATU Worker News, a group of B B Bread strikers told of how they had initially

used company bags to cover themselves at night but these were taken away by management and they were forced to use cardboard boxes.

'The company also closed the canteen. Management thought that they could starve us off the premises,' one striker said.

However, strikers' families brought food to the factories and workers at the nearby Clover Dairies donated crates of Amahewu.

One of the highlights of the period of occupation for the B B Bread workers was when during one lunchtime the Clover workers marched singing down Sydney Road to the bakery's gates.

Similar solidarity demonstrations were held at the Congella brewery and Dunlop (both on Sydney Road) and also at Universal Mills, Forbo Kromenie and Metal Box.

In the second week, it became obvious that the other three unions were not prepared for a lengthy strike.

Their members began to drift back to work and the union officials started to push for a settlement.

At the end of the week when mediation did not bring an improved offer from the employers, the other unions signed a return-to-work.

With the crumbling of the united strike, SFAWU members decided at a meeting on the Saturday to return to work the following day and continue the fight for a living wage from within the factory.

The decision was to accept the employers' offer as the minimum for the industry but to push for an improved increase at plant level.

However, when the strikers went back to the bakeries, the management refused to let them in until the workers signed an undertaking stating that they accepted the employers' offer and that they would not raise the issue of wages for another year.

This the workers refused to do, so they were locked out by management.

On Monday August 5 after a mammoth six-hours of negotiations, SFAWU managed to get the employers to agree that wages and conditions of employment could still be raised at plant-level. The workers then returned to work.

The experience of the Durban bread strike has shown once again the importance of having only one union per industry. Had there been only one union, the division among the strikers would not have occurred.

FOSATU's worker choirs now feature on new record

It is FOSATU.

And the Durban bus drivers' choir sings, 'We call on you workers, Unite so we can conquer.'

As FOSATU unions move into more factories and with each new struggle, new songs are being sung.

Different music traditions have influenced these new worker songs.

Some of the choirs like the Sizanani Bantu Transport Choir (the Lucky Stars) sing in the style of the Isicathamiya music of the Mbube

competitions.

These choirs consist of only men as the Mbube tradition started in the men's only hostels in the cities. An important part of their performance is the intricate dance steps which they do while singing.

Most of the popular songs sung in almost every FOSATU meeting use tunes from songs sung in church with the words changed.

At the end of the FOSATU record, workers from the Braitex textile factory sing many of these songs. These

songs were recorded during a lunchbreak at the factory.

One of the most memorable of these is 'Thula Sizwe', which in one part of the song says, 'FOSATU will fight for us, The freedom is ours, We shall get freedom, FOSATU is yours'.

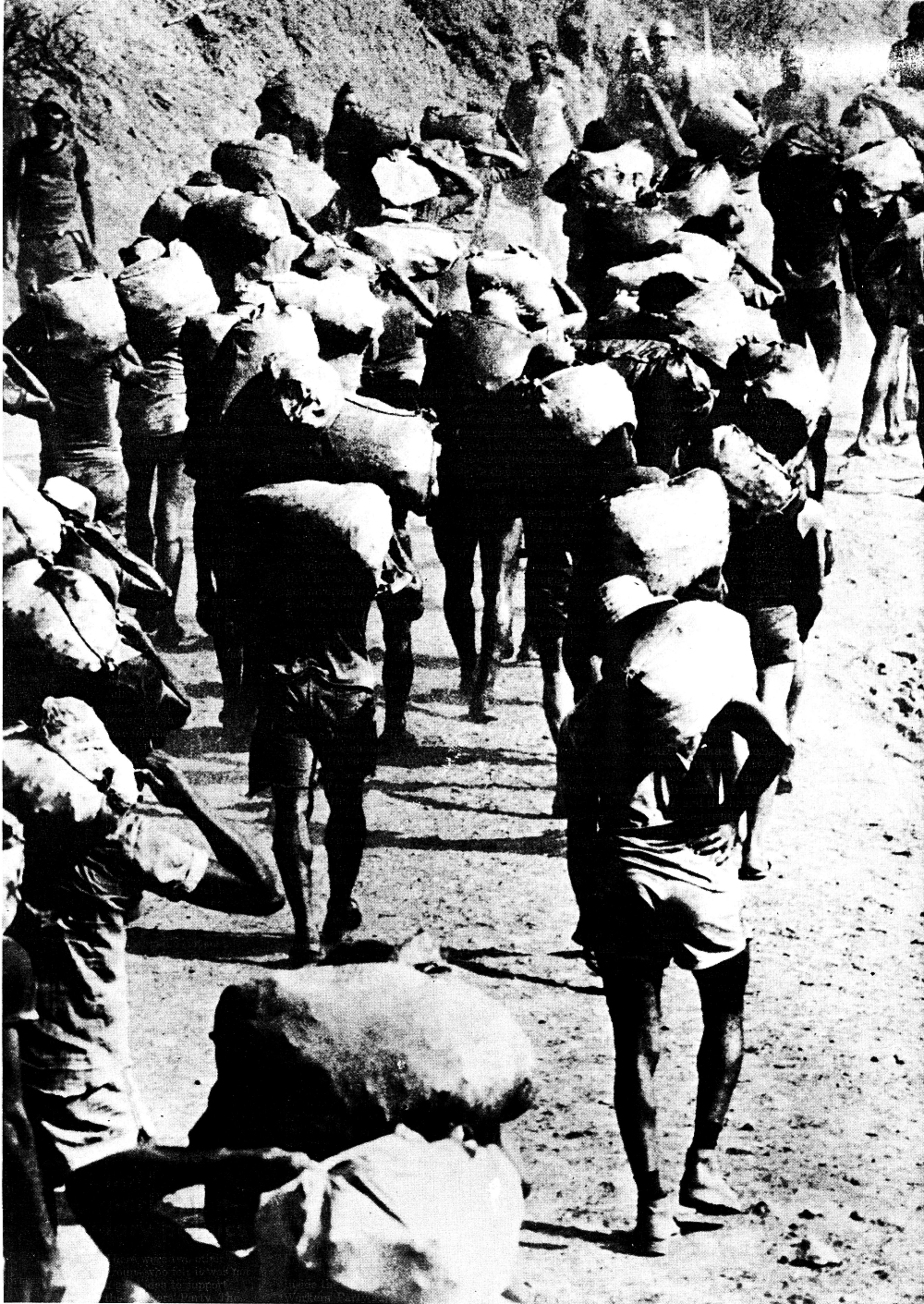
Under the influence of church music, many choirs have sprung up in FOSATU factories which involve both men and women singers. Dancing is also an important part of their performance but it is not the complex steps of Mbube but the bold, strident stamping of

traditional tribal dancing.

The Frame choir is one of these choirs which at last year's Education Workshop impressed people as much by their dancing as their singing. On the record they sing 'Can we please come together and build a union, The employers are making us fight amongst ourselves.'

All in all, the record is a celebration of the newly discovered power that South African workers are beginning to feel — the power of an organised working class.

The FOSATU record is available at R6 (and tapes at R5) from the union offices in Germiston or from the FOSATU Printing Unit, P O Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014.



Brazilian workers carry sacks of gold bearing rock at the Serra Pelada open cast mines. Over 50 000 workers work under appalling conditions at these mines in the Eastern Amazon.

BRAZIL

A WORKERS' PARTY

One of the main reasons for the fact that only four percent of Brazil's population voted for the Workers' Party was that the party was a new organisation and many people were not sure whether it would succeed. So they were cautious about giving it support. It had not yet proved itself. Many of its ideas were new and workers needed a chance to get used to them. Even though thousands saw the need to support the party, many millions had not had the experience of the big strike movements to guide them.

Another reason for its low support was the rules of the election. These rules were decided by the army. They said that all your votes had to go to candidates of the same party. So if you wanted to vote for the Workers' Party for your local council but not for governor, you could not do that. Your vote would be cancelled.

Some workers felt that the main thing in the elections was to defeat the ruling party which had supported the military in power. So they decided to vote for the main opposition party, the PMDB, which stood for the best chance of defeating the government's party. But if they voted for the PMDB for practical reasons, they had to stick to this for all the different seats which were being elected. They could not give support to the Workers' Party, even at local level, without breaking the rules and wasting their vote.

All this did not mean that the Workers' Party lost support. In fact, party membership has risen to almost a quarter of a million supporters. But it did mean that the Workers' Party had less of a voice in the national and state assemblies and in local councils.

Trade union struggle not parliamentary politics

There were two other groups who felt it was not a good idea to support the Workers' Party. The one group felt that it

Continuing his two-part feature which looks at the Workers' Party in Brazil, David Fig of the International Labour Research and Information Group explains why only four percent of the people voted for the party in the elections. He suggests that the main reason was that the party had not yet proved itself, however, there were also divisions among the workers and other groupings as to whether to give support to the Workers' Party.

was not important to get involved in parliamentary politics. The main task of the workers was to carry on building the trade union struggle. There were still many problems inside the trade unions which had to be overcome, like getting rid of the leaders who supported the government and bosses, like fighting for shop stewards' committees inside all the factories, and so on.

Another group thought that it was important to get involved in party politics, but they preferred to support the bigger opposition party, the PMDB. This party consisted of a number of liberal and some conservative politicians, and had the support of businessmen, students, some intellectuals, and middle class interests. In some parts of Brazil, there was a good chance for the PMDB to do well in elections, because so many of the people were against the military dictatorship. The PMDB had always opposed army rule and believed in democracy.

Brazil has two communist parties, both of which are illegal. They could not run their own candidates in elections. So, instead they gave their support to the PMDB. They felt that the Workers' Party represented only the 'narrow interests of workers', while the PMDB represented a large variety of interests which together would make up a stronger force against the military government.

The Workers' Party argued that the PMDB was not a party which spoke up for workers. It was a party which represented the views of the bosses. So it was difficult to see that workers would benefit by giving it support. The whole history of Brazilian politics showed that the workers had never benefited much from supporting parties which had no worker leadership.

Inside the unions, the Workers' Party supporters also argued that it was

wrong for the supporters of the two communist parties to give their backing to the stooges and yes-men of the government who were put in charge of some of the unions. The two groups refused to give their support to the Workers' Party.

In many cases the trade union movement and the workers' political movement have not reached full unity.

But there was one issue which brought out the greatest amount of unity ever seen in Brazil.

The military decided that the next president should be elected from the politicians rather than from the military itself. Power would pass from the army back to the civilian president and the parliament. This was a great victory for the Workers' Party and the rest of the democratic movement which had been struggling to end 21 years of military rule.

But instead of agreeing that all the voters in Brazil could choose the next president, the army said that only 686 people could vote. These 686 consisted of MPs, state representatives and city councillors.

When the people heard that they themselves would not be able to vote they were very angry indeed. The Workers' Party, together with other democratic organisations, launched a campaign for what they called DIRECT elections, where everyone would have the vote for the next president of Brazil.

One million protest in the streets of Rio

This campaign was huge. In the streets of Rio de Janeiro, one million people protested their right to vote. In Sao Paulo, even more came out into the

streets to demonstrate — a million and a half.

But the military still refused to allow everyone the vote. So the Workers' Party decided to boycott the election completely. This meant that the party MPs and councillors would not be part of the 686 who could vote.

The two parties that were left in the race were the government party, which had supported the army in power for 21 years, and the PMDB opposition. Each of these put up a candidate. But the government party's candidate was a corrupt politician who was hated by many in his party. So this caused a split, and many MPs left the government party and decided to vote for the PMDB candidate, for president.

In the elections, the PMDB-breakaway coalition won the majority of the 686 votes. So the PMDB candidate, Tancredo Neves, and the breakaway vice-president Jose Sarney were ready to take office on January 15 1985.

But on January 14, Tancredo Neves fell ill, and after seven serious operations, died in hospital in April. So even though the army is no longer directly in power, even though Brazil is supposed to become a democracy again, the man who is president today was one of the people who for many years supported the dictatorship in power. And most of the people in his cabinet are bankers, businessmen and politicians from the old regime. There are no workers in the cabinet. And the government has not introduced policies in favour of the working class.

Struggle continues for a fully democratic Brazil

But most people under-

stand that the president was not elected by all the people of Brazil. The Workers' Party is carrying on its struggle for direct elections and for a fully democratic Brazil.

As Lula put it, 'The government has no policy of full employment, no policy on education and so on. We see the task of the Workers' Party is to expose this and to get back to basic issues, the demands from the slums. Our focus is our stomachs, our houses, our schools. Democracy means the right to life — the basic rights, housing, transport, land and work. Democracy is not a word game, it's a practice. It's people being able to decide what they want to do. My personal belief is the dictatorship of the proletariat and for me that means that the majority decides things. Until the workers take over the political and economic decisions, we won't have democracy in Brazil.'

Lula is still president of the party and has also been elected to the executive of the metalworkers' union which he once led. So he still has direct contact with the shop floor and the everyday struggles of the workers.

The Workers' Party has also given its support to a new trade union federation of the more militant unions. This federation, the CUT (Central Unica Dos Trabalhadores), was formed in 1983 and does not enjoy legal status under Brazil's harsh labour laws. But nevertheless it has support in many parts of Brazil and is struggling for an independent labour movement free from government interference and control. It has been the main force behind the huge strikes of May 1985, in which many thousands of workers, civil servants and teachers united against the government's attempts to freeze wages and stop all strikes.

The Workers' Party still faces many problems in trying to organise and to spread support all over Brazil. Its main strength is still in the Sao Paulo area and in some rural parts of Brazil. It needs to work very hard to get its ideas across to all Brazilian workers. But as an experiment in giving political content to the struggles of Brazil's workers, the future of the Workers' Party is one worth watching.

CWIU climbs back at Sasol

Secunda stewards acquitted

IN February this year an armed man was discovered by workers in a general meeting at Secunda.

Workers were furious and attacked him. During the attack he pulled out his loaded gun and aimed at shop stewards. The workers disarmed him and marched him to the platform.

He then revealed himself as a policeman but could produce no identification.

Workers refused to believe he was a policeman and demanded he be taken to the police station and that a charge be laid against him.

On arrival at the police station, stewards and organisers were shouted at by policemen who accused them of stealing the gun.

The police refused to listen to the complaint and arrested a shop steward. A second shop steward was arrested two days later.

The shop stewards were charged with robbery and assault. Later the robbery charge was dropped.

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union felt that the case must be strongly defended. Police and informers must be taught that they have no right to attend union meetings, the union said.

After several court appearances in Evander, the shop stewards were acquitted on all charges.

Three-month legal strike

ABOUT 125 Metal and Allied Workers Union members at Pinetown factory, Natal Die Casting, have been out on a legal strike for over three months.

A union organiser said that for over two years the union has been struggling to get the company to seriously negotiate wages with it.

Things came to a head at the end of the latest round of negotiations when Natal Die Castings was only prepared to offer R29.

After the workers had been on strike for a few days, Natal Die Casting sacked them all.

When one of the workers went back to the factory to see what was happening, one of the directors said he would employ him if he resigned from the union.

Some of the strikers have reported that the company called in the SAP's Security Branch to assist them with their strike problems. The police even went to the union offices to find an organiser and while there arrested one of the workers.

Natal Die Casting has told the union that there are no more vacancies at the factory and that it is not interested in talking to MAWU anymore. It has hired scabs to replace the strikers.

The strikers have been meeting in the union offices every week to discuss the situation and to keep united.

MAWU has declared a dispute with the company and will be taking court action against it for its unfair actions. The union has also raised money to help support the strikers and has handed out food parcels.

ry, your contract will not be renewed. There was no hearing and no appeal,' she added.

After talks with the union, management agreed to discontinue this practice.

'All dismissals must now follow the procedure, which includes a system of warnings and a formal inquiry where shaft stewards will be present to represent workers,' she said.

First time

Commenting on the wages, the union spokesperson said that up to now Sasol had always paid the extremely low wage rates laid down by the Chamber of Mines.

'But this year, for the first time, Sasol has paid increases above those given by the Chamber.'

In terms of a wage agreement negotiated with the CWIU, workers on the lowest grade received an increase of 25 percent from July 1 — the overall increase was 22 percent.

'The wages of the Sasol workers, and in particular the the mine workers, do not yet approach a living wage,' the union spokesperson said.

'However, these gains are a significant step forward. Sasol workers will go forward to the 1986 negotiations with renewed determination to fight for a living wage for all,' she concluded.



Flashback: One of the many Sasol workers waiting to be bused back to the homelands last November

gap between the lower paid and the more highly paid workers.

'It was the workers earning only R300 per month that were suffering the most,' the spokesperson explained.

The company finally agreed to pay workers on the bottom four grades an increase of R75 per month from July 1 — the next three grades received a slightly higher cash increase.

This represented a 25 percent increase for the lowest paid, and an overall increase of 19,3 percent.

Meanwhile, on the mines, where the CWIU has over 5 000 members, things are real-

ly moving.

An agreement on shaft steward rights has been completed and elections are due to take place soon.

And already the union has begun to take up the 'appalling' wages and working conditions which exist on the mines.

'Recently, it came to light that a system of hidden dismissals was being practised on the mines.'

'Although, there is a disciplinary procedure, management was getting round this,' the CWIU spokesperson said.

leave and renew the contract they were often told, sor-

EVER since the agreement with Sasol in March this year, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union has been working hard to rebuild and strengthen organisation at the Sasol plants and Sasol mines.

In under four-months, the union has climbed back up to a paid-up majority in the plants. And as an added bonus, it now has a significant majority at the Sasol mines.

This is a tremendous achievement for the CWIU which during the November stay-away last year watched Sasol fire 6 000 workers and bus them back to the homelands.

In the March settlement, the company agreed to take back seventy percent of these workers. It also agreed to formally recognise union shop stewards.

The CWIU reports that at the Sasol II & III plants the team of shop stewards have been using their extra rights to fight and win many issues.

Wages was one of the issues recently discussed with Sasol management.

'Sasol makes vast profits but its wage levels are very low. We want a living wage for all workers,' a union spokesperson said.

In the wage talks, CWIU argued that management should not give a percentage increase as this would only widen the



MAWU members at the unions' Annual General Meeting — at this meeting they rejected Seifsa's wage offer

Metal workers dissatisfied with industrial council wage increases

DISATISFACTION with this year's industrial council wage agreement has already led to strikes at two Transvaal companies and another one could be on the way as metal workers attempt to win a better wage increase at plant-level.

This follows the Metal and Allied Workers Union's refusal to sign the metal industry's industrial council agreement for the third year in a row.

The union has argued that it would not do so until the employers agreed to pay a living wage.

At the June 26 industrial council meeting, the metal employers' association, Seifsa made its final offer of a 14c to 24c an hour increase. This has been accepted by all the metal unions except MAWU.

The first factory to take strike action in support of their wage demand was Silvertown

Engineering, a Pretoria radiator factory organised by the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union.

After six days the 400-odd Silvertown workers went back when the company agreed to pay them an immediate 15c increase and a further 5c increase in October and December.

The Siemens' workers, however, were not so lucky.

About 1 250 workers from five Siemens factories went on strike when the company and the Metal and Allied Workers Union deadlocked over the workers' demand for a R1 an hour increase.

Union sources said that during the strike negotiations, the company initially argued that across-the-board increases could only be discussed at the industrial council but that it was prepared to give merit increases, however these were

non-negotiable.

Another issue which was a matter of contention during the talks was whether Siemens would take back all the strikers. The company said it would not take back 40 of the strikers who it claims were involved in violence.

After many rounds of talks, Siemens eventually agreed to negotiate the merit increases and that the 40 workers would only be suspended pending a joint union/company inquiry.

The strikers returned to work on July 29. However, according to union sources, the company is now refusing to hold a joint inquiry and instead is demanding that the cases of the 40 suspended workers be referred immediately to mediation.

Meanwhile, at the four Transvaal Dorbyl factories a date has been set for the ballot

to determine whether workers are prepared to take strike action over the issues of wages. It will be held on August 12.

The workers are demanding a R3,50 per hour minimum and a 50c across-the-board-increase, but much like Siemens, Dorbyl is arguing that it cannot negotiate wages and conditions of service at plant-level.

Union sources report that Dorbyl has banned all general meetings inside the factories and that it dismissed four shop stewards for holding a general meeting inside the plant in spite of the fact that it was held in the workers own time.

MAWU has accused the company of trying to 'cripple' the union before the strike ballot is held.

It has also said it would be taking legal action against the company unless it reinstates the shop stewards.

THE Metal and Allied Workers Union's BTR Sarmcol campaign is by far the largest campaign over a single factory ever undertaken by an independent union in this country.

The campaign kicked off with a local boycott of all the shops in the small town of Howick but it quickly spread to nearby Pietermaritzburg where workers held a one-day stayaway on July 18.

The issue at stake is the reinstatement of some 900 workers that the company fired only two days after they had embarked on a legal strike.

The workers who have been waiting patiently for two years for Sarmcol to sign a recognition agreement with MAWU decided as a last resort to take strike action on April 30. They have been out now for nearly four months.

After sacking the strikers, the company began to recruit scabs mainly from the Maritzburg townships. It was inevitable, therefore, that the union's campaign would spread to Pietermaritzburg.

Sarmcol workers began to inform the Maritzburg workers and their communities about their struggle, in order to get support from them (initially financial) and to try and prevent scabbing.

The campaign to publicize the Sarmcol struggle began in earnest towards the end of June when 11 bus-loads of strikers drove down from Howick to Maritzburg.

In the townships, the Sarmcol workers stopped the buses at various points and held spontaneous meetings. The strikers' placards effectively put across the message of their struggle. One read 'Workers Unite Don't Scab'.

During the following week some of the strikers, together with MAWU shop stewards and Sarmcol Support Group members, went from door-to-door in the townships further explaining the reasons for their strike. They systematically covered the three major black townships and most of the Indian residential areas.

At the same time, FOSATU shop steward locals were discussing whether to take some form of action in support of the Sarmcol strike. They decided on a stayaway.

The call for a stayaway was made public on July 6 at a meeting in Maritzburg's Edendale townships which was attended by community and student organisations.

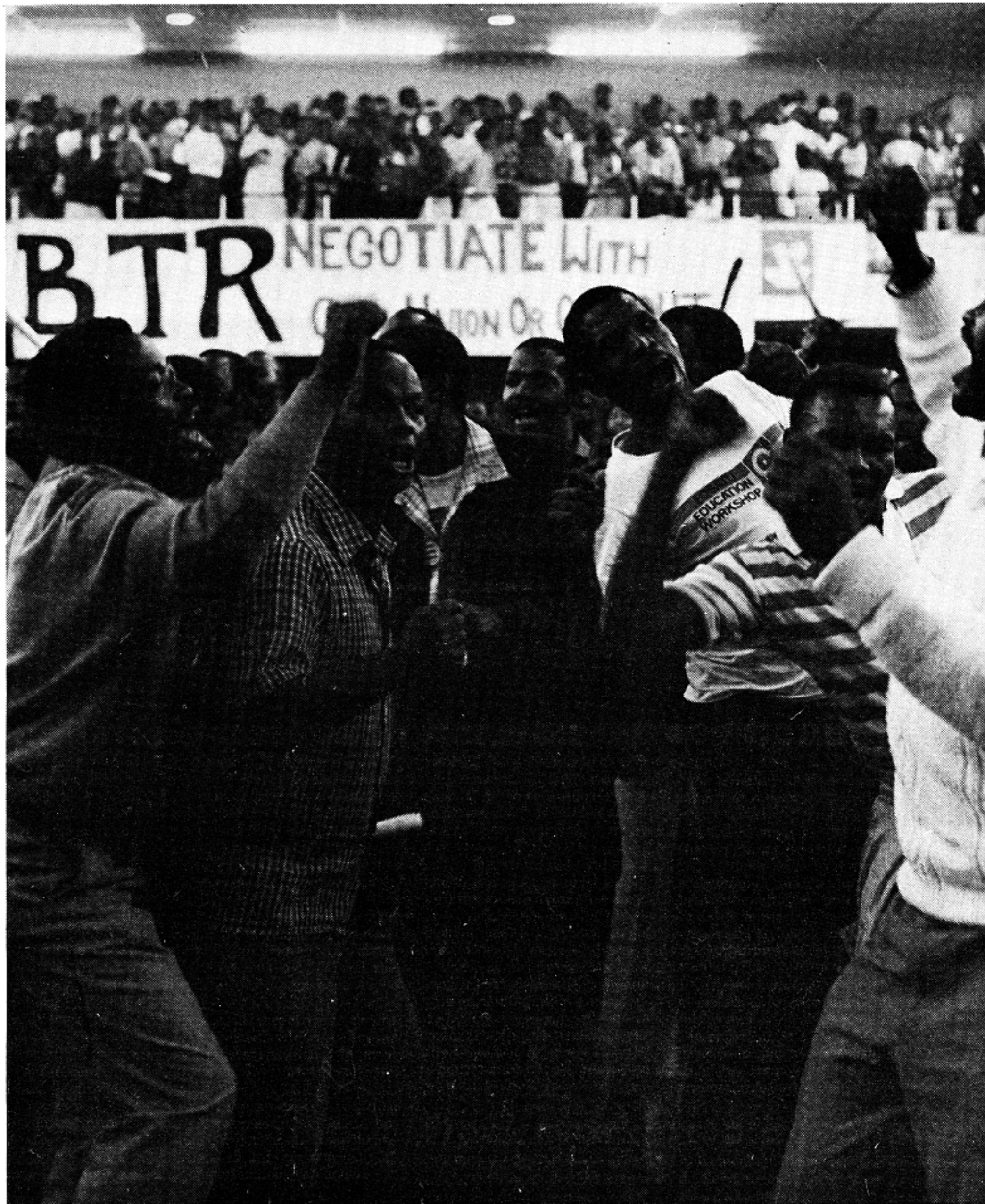
From then on the FOSATU began preparing for the stayaway. It was discussed in detail in the Maritzburg Shop Stewards Council and 60 Sarmcol workers went from factory to factory talking to workers. Discussions were also held with non-FOSATU workers, taxi owners, and church organisations.

The demands for the stayaway were discussed widely and it was decided to limit them to demands relating only to the Sarmcol dispute. The major demand was for the reinstatement of the strikers.

On July 18 the stayaway was a complete success. Pietermaritzburg's main business area was absolutely quiet and owners of petrol stations were forced to run the petrol pumps themselves. All 17 of the black schools were closed. No bus drivers went to work. At least 92 percent of the city's black workers heeded the stayaway call.

On the same day, workers in other areas of Natal staged demonstrations.

Sarmcol: the biggest campaign ever



Singing Sarmcol strikers at a joint meeting with community and youth organisations

In Durban's Sydney Road about 3 000 workers from Dunlop and Clover Dairies marched up and down the busy road waving placards bringing traffic almost to a standstill. Similar marches took place in the Durban industrial areas of Jacobs and Congella.

At Machadadorp, the entire workforce at Ferralloys stopped work and demanded that their management send a telex to Sarmcol. The company responded by locking out the workers.

Following the success of the stayaway, FOSATU, with the backing of the community and student organisations, has now decided to launch a boycott of shops in Maritzburg's main business area in order to keep up the pressure on Sarmcol. This is due to be launched on August 17.

Meanwhile, the city's Mayor and the Chamber of Commerce have at last realised that the Sarmcol dispute does involve them. It seems they too learnt

something from the stayaway.

At a meeting organised by the Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce told MAWU that it intends to recommend to Sarmcol that it accept advisory mediation. The union once again stated that it was prepared to negotiate unconditionally with the company and the Chamber said it had a similar commitment from Sarmcol.

International pressure on the company is continuing to increase. British workers at Dun-

lop (which is now owned by BTR), who are involved in a retrenchment dispute with the company, have threatened to take action over Sarmcol as well.

Also, Britain's Trade Union Congress at the invitation of FOSATU will be sending out a senior trade unionist to investigate the dispute. And a debate on British television between the Sarmcol chairman and MAWU's Bernie Fannaroff has been arranged.

During the first six months of this year, more than 100 000 miners have taken strike action over wages, bad and unsafe working conditions and the harassment of shaft stewards.

In many of these strikes, violent action by police and mine security has left many workers dead and hundreds injured.

At the head of these struggles has been the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) — South Africa's biggest and fastest growing union.

In September last year more than 70 000 miners were involved in the country's first legal mine strike when workers rejected the Chamber of Mines' wage offer.

Although, there were eleventh hour attempts at a settlement this did not prevent a strike. This strike left 10 dead and hundreds injured.

Since then the union has grown rapidly and enjoys the support of over 150 000 workers in the gold, coal, copper and diamond mines of



rights,' said a shaft steward from Vaal Reefs Gold Mine.

Although wages remains the most emotive issue amongst mineworkers, job reservation and health and safety are priorities on the union's agenda.

'In the mines, health and safety is a top priority. You have got to be alive or uninjured to earn wages. Therefore for us health and safety comes first,' said NUM's general secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa.

The NUM has also launched a determined campaign to rid the industry of job reservation which has protected white miners for decades. At its January conference the NUM resolved to tackle all aspects of mine apartheid — its low wages, bad working conditions, as well as racism and white baaskap.

Although, the Chamber of Mines has refused to allow the union to be party to negoti-

Working on the mines is no picnic!

South Africa.

This year the NUM has again rejected the Chamber's final wage offer of between 14 and 19 percent.

Instead the union has demanded a 22 percent increase across-the-board, paid leave of 21 days, a 75 percent leave allowance, and a six hour reduction in the working time per fortnight.

In addition the union has demanded participation in the negotiations for the removal of job reservation and May Day as a paid holiday. These were, however, rejected by the Chamber.

The mining houses have made huge profits this year. Gold Fields, for example, showed a record aggregate after tax of R229 million despite the lower earnings caused by the decreased gold production.

However, workers underground are earning as little as R166 per month and workers above ground are earning even less than this. According to NUM's Manoko Nchwe some of these workers are earning only R135 a month.

Forewarning of workers militancy and dissatisfaction was given in the first week of July, the traditional increase date for miners, when a number of strikes broke out at six mines belonging to the General Mining Union Corporation (Gencor) and at the Western Platinum mines in the Western Transvaal.

Over 27 000 mineworkers were involved in these strikes. Three workers were killed in the unrest as mine security and police fired tear gas, rubber bullets and birdshot at workers. Mine property was destroyed, a concession store burnt and 560 workers were returned to the homelands.

Working and living conditions are very bad on the mines. In many of the hostels more than 20 workers share a room where ventilation is often very poor and there is little privacy.

At a special conference held at Welkom recently, delegates representing 29 gold and coal mines decided to take strike action on August 25 if the Chamber of Mines does not come up with a 'realistic' wage offer. This could be the biggest strike ever to hit the mining industry involving some 400 000 mineworkers. The last major strike by black miners in 1946 involved only 70 000 workers. In this article, FOSATU Worker News takes a look at the background to the planned strike and at some of the other issues which have been taken up by the National Union of Mineworkers — South Africa's biggest and fastest growing union.

are migrants who come from various parts of Southern Africa to look for work.

Besides accommodation, food is also a major grievance. At Kloof Gold Mine a worker complained of the quality of the food, 'We often have to eat raw porridge, fish with scales and vegetables that are not properly cooked. The pap is not properly done, it is either stiff or watery.'

Because the food is bad, workers eat at the local shops and buy from concession stores. But they soon discovered that the conditions there were no better so workers decided to boycott the shops until conditions were improved.

Salae Salae, regional organiser of the NUM in Klerksdorp, explained the reasons for the boycotts, 'Workers are being sold old and stale food. The prices were very high and the workers were taxed on items which were exempted. Workers were also given body searches and abused by the shop owners. Instead of giving workers change, shop owners would give them sweets.'

Mineworkers have organised boycott committees and alternative sources of getting food.

At many of the Transvaal mines these boycotts have been successful. At Western Deep Levels Gold Mine work-

ers won a major victory when the first recognition agreement between the union and shop owners was signed.

This agreement has given mineworkers new consumer rights. New prices will now be discussed by both workers and shop owners. The opening and closing times of the shops will also be negotiated. Customers can return anything they are not satisfied with. And shop owners have promised to make sure that all food is fresh and well cooked.

It is clear that mineworkers are tired of being exploited and have decided to wage their battle not only at the workplace but outside it as well.

As one shaft steward put it, 'We are already earning low wages. The increases are also very small. So why should we let these shop owners rob us. We must organise and fight them also.'

A new confidence has emerged amongst miners. The growth of the NUM has mainly been responsible for this. Mineworkers have begun to see the power in organised unity.

'For years mineworkers were thought to be stupid and inferior. They never went to the nearby township wearing their wrist bands because they were too shy to show that they were miners. But this has all changed. We have shown what we can do and are fighting for our

ations on the removal of job reservation, the struggles on the ground by workers have not stopped.

More than 17 000 mineworkers were dismissed in April this year at Vaal Reefs Gold Mine and the Hartbeesfontein Gold Mine when they refused to do 'charging up' — a task reserved for white miners.

'We were forced to do the work of white miners although we never received the wages,' said a dismissed worker.

Although the union suffered a major set back with the dismissals it did not destroy the spirit of the workers. All it did was demonstrate management's determination to protect white miners and stop the growing power and presence of the NUM.

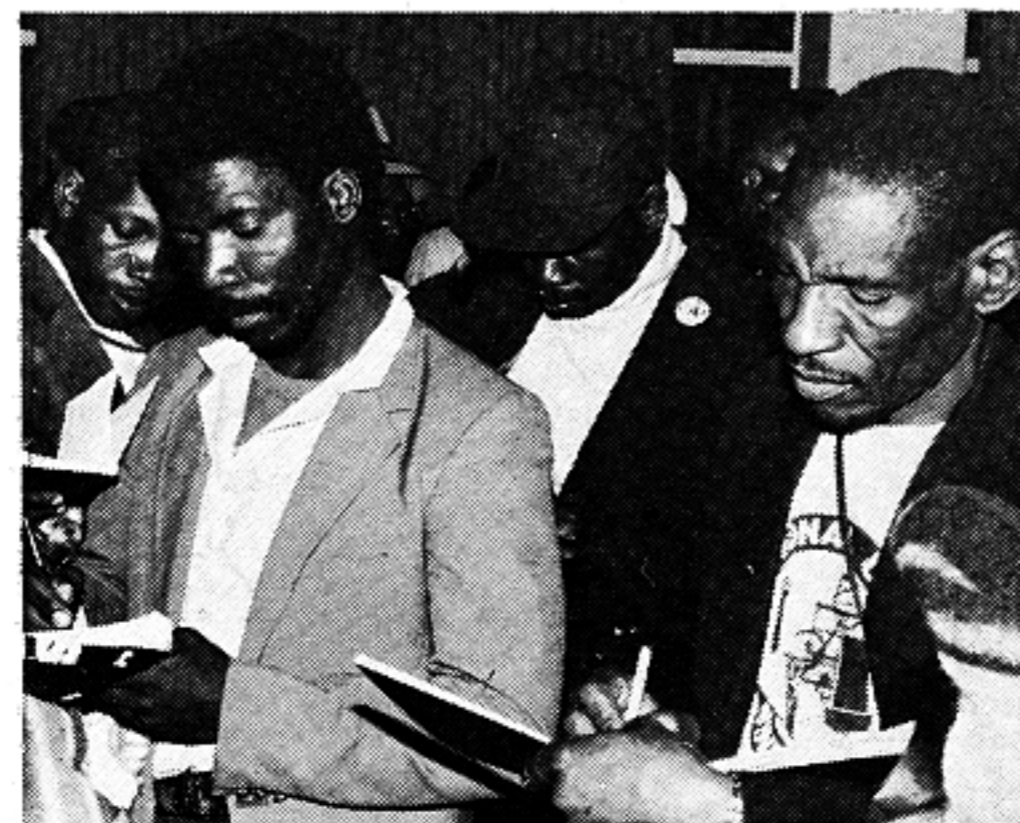
In the many safety disputes, the mining bosses have used union bashing and wide scale repression to get their way. Rietspruit coal miners and Vaal Reefs gold miners have the scars to prove it. They suffered badly at the hands of police and mine security in their attempts to get safer working conditions.

Forty-six thousand gold miners have died since the turn of the century. Six hundred die each year in occupational accidents in South Africa's gold mines. Clearly the blame for the present unsafe conditions must be laid at the door of the mining bosses.

The NUM has committed itself to fight for democratic safety rights at shaft floor level and at industry level.

The union has drawn up a Miners Bill of Rights. Its major demands are: the recognition of safety stewards, the right to refuse to work under conditions believed to be unsafe, the right to request a special inspection, the right to health and safety training, and the right to participate in the planning of mining operations.

'It is only when the Miners Bill of Rights is recognised in practice that we can confidently say we are on the way towards safer underground gold mining,' said Cyril Ramaphosa.



NUM delegates at the Welkom meeting



This is the last part of a series written especially for students which looked at why trade unions were formed by workers. Workers found out that only by joining together could they fight against the capitalists desire to suck more and more profit from them. In this section we look at the different forms of trade unions and why the principle of workers control is so important to the independent unions in South Africa. In future issues of FOSATU Workers News we will be looking at the history of education. Students, if you have any poems, letters, or drawings you want to be included in this space, write to The Editor, P O Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014.

Only workers can directly challenge the capitalists

Workers around the world understood that if they joined together in groups and demanded better conditions and more pay, the owners of the factories would have to listen to them. They realised that taken together their role in the production of goods was more important than the role of their bosses. Workers realised that if they joined together and acted together they could cut back the capitalists' profit.

One way in which workers have tried to do this in the past is through trade unions. South Africa has had a long history of trade unionism. But not all trade unions are the same. For example, in the early days of gold mining workers organised themselves around their skills. The role of these craft unions was not to protect all workers, but only those which had a particular kind of job. So all the carpenters may have formed a union which would fight the capitalists for higher wages for carpenters only. These craft unions divided the workers because they protected the more skilled workers from those without any skills.

Another type of trade unions which have existed in South Africa are general unions. They were organised under very poor working conditions. These unions arose with the factory system, and tried to organise all workers, skilled or unskilled across all industries. This was the case with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) formed in 1919. These general unions because of their broadness were easily dominated by a few individuals.

More recently, however, a new kind of trade unionism has arisen. These unions are often called industrial unions. Unlike the general unions, different unions were formed by workers for the various industries. For example, all the workers employed in factories which make motor cars and trucks organised themselves into a motor union.

Unity gives workers the power to fight for better conditions

Industrial unionism is important because it allows workers to elect their leaders in the factory. These worker leaders are called shop stewards. The shop steward's job is to represent the workers and negotiate for the workers with the bosses. The shop steward cannot just do what he or she wants. If the shop steward doesn't listen to the workers and carry out their instructions, the workers will remove him or her and elect somebody else. In this way, shop stewards are accountable to the workers that have elected them.

Most industrial unions

encourage the participation of their members in the day to day running of the union. This is to make sure that the leaders of the union don't simply take decisions on their own. They must be controlled by the members. This is why democracy is so important to these trade unions. The role of the shop steward is very important in the union's democracy.

Why have the workers organised themselves in this way in the factory? One of the biggest reasons is that they know just how powerful the capitalist bosses are. Workers know that by acting on their own or in small groups they have very little power. Bosses can easily fire small numbers of workers if they try and fight for better working conditions. This is why democracy is so important in a workers' organisation. It means that as many people as possible are involved in discussing which issues should be taken up, and how they should be acted upon. In this way the trade unions in the

factory ensure majority support for any decision taken.

It is very important to understand how workers have organised themselves against the bosses in the factories. This is because in a capitalist society power is held by the capitalist class and the government. For workers to resist this power and to have any say in the way in which things are produced and the way in which the society is governed, they must themselves act as a class.

The power of the workers comes from the fact that it is workers who operate the machines. The workers dig for gold, make the shoes, drive the buses, work in the iron foundries and build the roads. They produce the goods from which the capitalists make the profits. Because of this, the workers are the only people in society who can directly challenge the position of the bosses. The capitalist bosses need the workers. Without them there would be no food to eat, clothes to wear or houses to live in. In

other words, besides the capitalist class, the working class is the only group of people who have any economic power in a capitalist society.

The workers' struggle against exploitation by the capitalists has been a long one. Many gains have been made however. Throughout the world workers have struggled to try and shorten the number of hours that they work every day. In England for example, in the early days of capitalism and the factory system, women and children worked in the factories for up to 16 hours a day. There were great struggles by workers to reduce this time. In the 1840's the government passed a law which said that workers could only work for 10 hours a day. It was only in the 1900's that the working day was reduced to eight hours. In many countries workers still work for over eight hours a day. In South Africa workers put forward a demand on May Day this year for a forty



In the 19th Century, workers in the cotton mills (above) used to work for up to 15 hours a day

hour week (an eight hour day). In Germany workers had a massive campaign in 1984 for a 35 hour week.

Democratic unions prepare workers for their role in a future society

The shortening of the working week has not been the only area where workers have made great strides. The right to form democratic trade unions, the right to decent working conditions, and the right to better wages were all gains made by workers. Capitalists did not provide these rights out of the kindness of their hearts — they had to be fought for by workers. Battles around retrenchment, the unfair dismissal of workers, sexual harassment and maternity rights are still being fought by trade unions.

However, trade unions haven't only been concerned with the conditions of their membership on the shop floor of the factory. For example in 1984, FOSATU sent representatives from door to door in the townships to encourage people not to vote under the new constitution. And in many areas in South Africa, shop steward councils have been active in discussing and acting upon issues which affect workers in the community.

The gains made by workers' trade unions have been many. But more impressive than these gains has been the formation of an organisation directed and controlled by the workers themselves. Workers are gaining experience in decision-making in their trade unions. They are able to have some control over their own lives. Such an organisation opposes the strict authority of the capitalist bosses and trains workers for the role which they will play in a future society. In South Africa trade unions have become schools for worker democracy.

We can learn from the workers' struggle in the factory. Workers have shown that this is where real power lies. They have also shown that to use that power they have to organise in a particular way. It is this worker democracy that the workers have built themselves, from which the youth and workers of tomorrow must learn.

Sharpeville: March 21 1960

In 1960 before that terrible day of March 21 some workers resigned from work because they were preparing for that day. In March that campaign became very hot. Everywhere people wore stickers on their jackets saying 'Away with Passes'. If they offered you one of these stickers and you didn't take it you were labelled a sellout. Even people sitting in the shebeens had those stickers. Workers also wore them inside the factory.

It was the strongest campaign I've ever seen. Sometimes you saw people standing at the bus-stops asking people to burn their passes, because the idea was that people should surrender themselves at the nearest police station on March 21 without their passes. Some people started small fires at the bus-stops and everybody would take out their passes and burn them.

On the weekend before the 21st, we had parties — stokvels — drinking and having campaign workers there supplying us with those stickers and telling us about a meeting to be held. They told us not to go to work on Monday and to surrender at the new police station. They wanted to know who still had a pass. If you did you were a sell-out. You couldn't go and drink at any of the stokvels with a pass or without a sticker showing you were supporting the campaign.

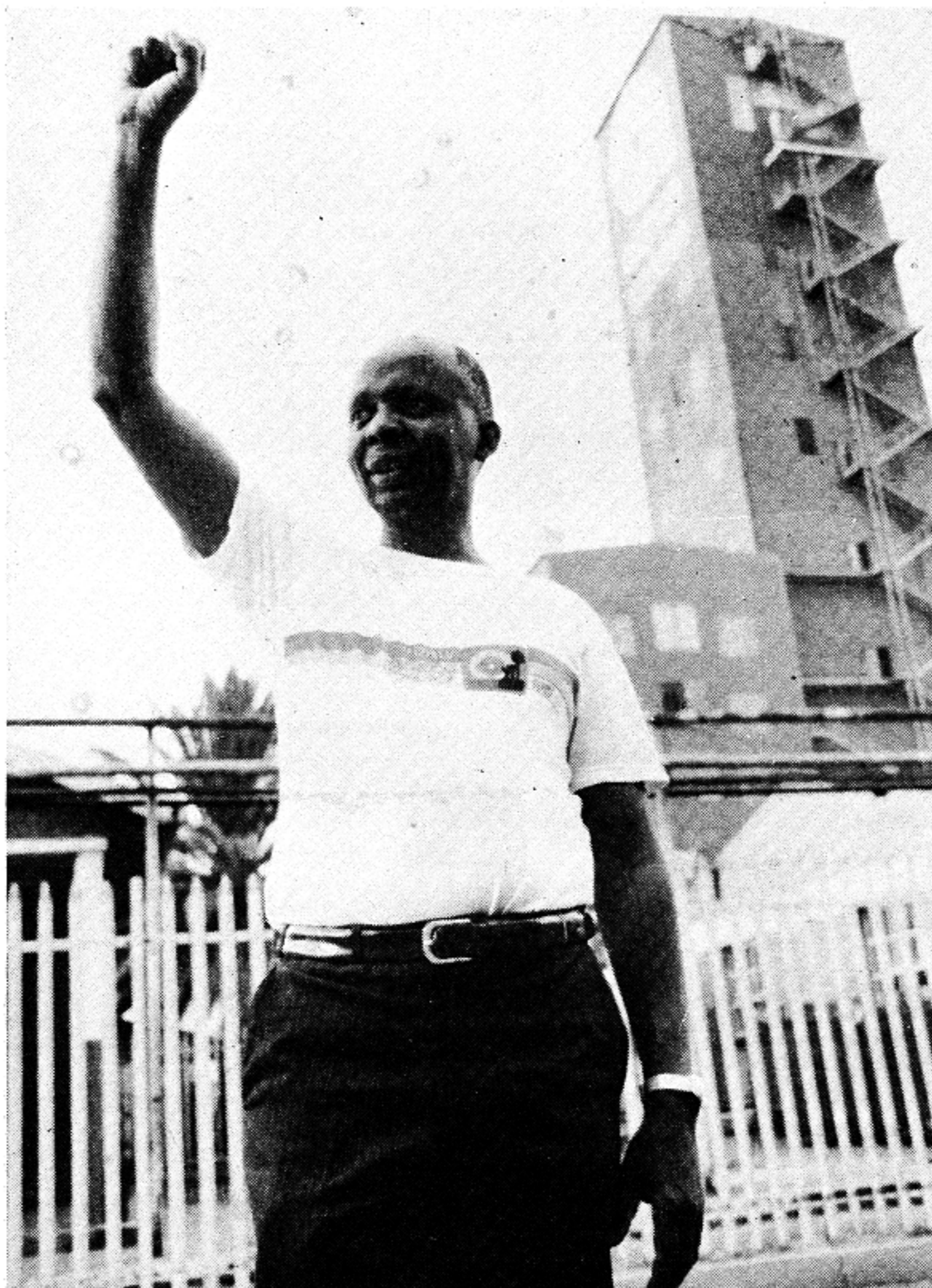
This thing was very hot. Everybody was prepared. I was doing night-shift that week. We knocked off Saturday morning. That Saturday we were in the shebeens discussing this thing.

'We only wanted to talk but the police beat us up'

On Sunday I don't know when I fell asleep but I was woken up at night by people shouting outside. My mother came and said people were knocking at the door and on the windows. I peeped through the window and they shouted, hey pulled me out to join them. They searched the house — they didn't want any men to remain in the houses. The sound of people banging on the doors was all around. There were a lot of people in the streets. We all went down the big street, to the police station.

Then someone shouted, 'They are coming!' and behind us there were a lot of jeeps that were infamous during that time. The police were armed with sjamboks and kieres. They also had big trucks. The S A Police and the municipal police together tried to disperse us. But when they came to us the people said, 'No.' We told them we didn't want to fight, we only wanted to talk. But the police beat us up, chasing people who ran in all directions. I ran home.

The next morning I woke up at five o'clock because I



Petrus Tom outside the African Cables factory where he used to work

As seen by Petrus Tom

'My message to the working class is that nobody will liberate you except yourselves. Don't give your struggle to intellectuals, academics and other organisations who do not have the workers' interests at heart, who want to further their aims at the expense of the workers.' So ends 'My Life Struggle', the latest in Ravan's Worker Series. 'My Life Struggle' is the life story of Petrus Tom who is the Metal and Allied Workers Union's organiser in Vereeniging. The book spans 50 years of South Africa's rich political history. In it Petrus Tom speaks about the Anti-Pass campaign in the 60's, joining SACTU, and finally his experiences in MAWU. Here, from the book, is Petrus Tom's account of the Sharpeville massacre.

was on day shift and had to board the six o'clock bus to work. I found that there were no buses. People were busy preaching that today we would not go to work. A big crowd gathered at the bus-stop. People were making sure that no-one would work that day.

We went to the Sharpeville police station. When we got into the station yard the police locked the gates. The leader went to

talk to the police. He told them that we had come to offer ourselves for arrest for not having passes. He reported to us that the police were still waiting for instructions from their seniors. The people started singing then and surrounded the police station. The people were excited but not angry; women and children were also there.

The police blocked the main street and would not allow

people to use the big street. Even the vehicles were blocked. We were only on the western, northern and eastern sides of the police station. The south was controlled by the police. The white policemen were carrying sten guns. The black policemen had bayonets and sjamboks.

Some time later we saw aeroplanes in the sky. This attracted the people and made the crowd grow. Then we

saw the saracens coming from the southwestern part of Sharpeville. The aeroplanes were flying high and low. The people were throwing their hats to the aeroplanes. They thought the aeroplanes were playing with them. They didn't realise that death was near.

Some people were standing at the western gate of the police station. Police asked them to make way for the saracens. A plainclothes policeman was driving a grey car. He took cooldrinks from the boot and gave them to the policemen. They were chatting amongst themselves while we were busy singing.

I don't know what caused the police to shoot. But immediately after the plainclothes policeman went back to his colleagues the shooting began. We heard only one sound and couldn't see anyone standing next to the yard. People fell on their backs, sides and stomachs. People were lying all over. Both on the eastern and western sides people were trying to run away.

'Only when they saw the blood did they see that the police meant business'

Fortunately for me they could not shoot on the side where I was standing. That is how I managed to get away. People were running in all directions in the townships. Some couldn't believe that people had been shot, they thought that they had heard fire crackers. Only when they saw the blood and dead people, did they see that the police meant business.

There were ambulances from all over as far as Baragwanath and trucks were taking the people who had been shot dead. People were busy loading the corpses onto the trucks. Those who were hurt were taken to Vereeniging Hospital and Baragwanath under police escort.

People started crying. Some were asking what had happened. Many were looking for their relatives. Nobody went to work on the second day. They couldn't go to work without knowing where their relatives were, whether they were dead or hurt. Many managed to escape with bullet wounds. But when they went to Vereeniging hospital they were arrested immediately. The leaders of the pass campaign were all arrested; the police knew them all. But they were not hurt in the shooting. Ordinary people got hurt and killed.

'My Life Struggle' is available from the FOSATU Printing Unit, P O Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014 or from Ravan Press, P O Box 31134, Braamfontein 2017. Normal price R5, Workers' price R3,50.