

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

WORKER STRUGGLES ON THE EAST RAND

Jeremy Baskin

East Rand Strike Wave

Jeremy Baskin

Germiston shop-steward's council

FCWU

Search for a Workable Relationship

The Worker's Struggle – where does FOSATU stand?

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Introduction

In this edition we look at some of the remarkable developments on the labour front in the East Rand.

Key features of the massive strike wave which swept the area during the last six months of 1981 are covered in an article by Baskin. Although he is primarily concerned with exploring the background causes of worker militancy. Baskin emphasizes that the developments on the East Rand go beyond the dramatic manifestation of management-labour conflict in the form of strike action. 'Strikes themselves are not the sum total of labour activity'. The various forms of organisation that emerge out of such conflict are central to the long term consolidation of worker strength.

One such organisational response on the East Rand is to be found in the FOSATU-based Germiston shop-stewards' council - the focus of a second article by the above author. Here Baskin describes the rapid growth of this new organ of worker power which is faced with the problem of simultaneously having to expand and consolidate organisation.

Also in this edition is published the full text of the address delivered by FOSATU general secretary Joe Foster at the Federation's Congress earlier this year.

briefings

Latest on Labour Detainees

In the latest in a series of intimidatory actions against the independent trade union movement, the following unionists have been detained:

- Philip Dlamini, who was taken from his Soweto home early on June 1. He had been general secretary of the South African Black Municipal Workers Union, and was one of the leaders of the massive municipal workers strike in Johannesburg in 1980. Recently, he broke away to form his own union.
- In the Ciskei, 3 trade unionists were arrested at a roadblock on June 18. They are Mr. Bonisile Noruche, East London branch secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU), Ms. Zodwa Maphela and Mr. Boy Soci, 2 workers from AFCWU. The head of Ciskei security, Brig. Charles Sebe, announced that the 3 would soon appear in court on charges under the Riotous Assemblies Act.
- On June 24, 4 members of the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA) were detained: Mr. Quraish Patel, (a journalist on the Daily News, Durban), Mr. Vas Soni, (a sub-editor on The Post, Durban), Mr. Joe Thloloe, (former Transvaal Vice-President of MWASA, now banned), and Mr. Mathatu Tsedu (now also banned). On the same day, 3 other people were detained, one of whom, Ms. Joyce Mokhesi, is the acting general secretary of CCAWUSA (Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa) in Johannesburg. She has been detained twice before under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act.

Police invoked Section 27c of the Police Act to prevent publication of details of the 7 detained on June 27, although some newspapers had printed details released by their families. These papers were warned, but no further action is expected. The irony of the situation is that Section 27c of the Police Act had been repealed only days before, with the passage of the new Information Bill. A spokesman said that police were investigating.

Ms. Cindy Mngadi

Cindy Mngadi, an organiser in the Durban Branch of the General Workers Union (GWU), was taken from her Lamontville home at 12.15 am on June 1. She was drawn out of the house on the pretext that a doctor friend waiting in the car wished to see her. She was then driven to an isolated place by 4 men claiming to be Security Police. They stopped the car, and, she says, "one of the men threatened me with a gun and wanted me to tell them 'everything'". (Rand Daily Mail, 2/6/82). After questioning her for over 2 hours about her

union, they dropped her near the offices of the Port Natal Administration Board in Lamontville, warning that they would visit her again. She walked home at 3 am.

In a statement released shortly afterwards, the GWU slammed the incident as "sheer political thuggery" and said it "made a mockery" of government assurances that trade unionists were now able to function free of government intervention. (Rand Daily Mail, 3/6/82).

Ms. Mngadi has laid a charge in connection with the incident.

INQUEST ON DR. NEIL AGGETT

As one news report stated, "whatever the findings of the Aggett inquest, the issues it is raising about the system of detention without trial are likely to reverberate throughout South Africa and abroad for some time". (Sunday Tribune 13/6/82).

The inquest, postponed for the third time until September 20, has so far heard evidence that:

- On January 19, Dr. Aggett made a statement to a visiting magistrate, alleging assault and torture during interrogation. This complaint was investigated only 3 weeks later, when Sgt. Gertruida Blom took a statement dictated by Dr. Aggett - 14 hours before his death. After dictating the statement, Dr. Aggett "did not elect to see a doctor".
- Sgt. Blom passed complaints from detainees back to the very people accused of ill-treating them - this was alleged by Mr. George Bizos, SC, appearing for the Aggett family;
- the police sergeant in charge of detainees at John Vorster Square in the month prior to Dr. Aggett's death had not heard of an Inspector of Detainees before the inquest;
- the Inspector of Detainees himself, Abraham Mouton, had found that detainees were reluctant to lodge complaints with him;
- on 3 separate occasions, 2 magistrates (on 29 December and 6 January respectively) and the Inspector of Detainees (4 January) had tried to see Dr. Aggett - each time he was unavailable;
- Dr. Aggett might be alive today had he seen a district surgeon;
- the district surgeon in practice did not have free access to detainees, and that the district surgeon visited a detainee only when called by the police;

- the inspector in charge of detainees had instructions to visit detainees every hour, but on the night of the 5 February (the night Dr. Aggett died) he was 'too busy';
- Dr. Aggett was made to do strenuous physical exercise on the tenth floor of John Vorster Square on the 25 January - this was evidence submitted by Maurice Smithers, a fellow detainee of Dr. Aggett's, who allegedly saw him through a frosted glass panel. After this event, when Mr. Smithers was returned to his cell in Randburg, he smuggled a note out of prison which found its way to a lawyer and then to Helen Suzman, MP, who read it out in parliament. In related evidence, Lieutenant Caswell Magoro, who had repeatedly told the court that he had not seen Dr. Aggett on the 25 January, later changed his evidence and admitted that he had taken Dr. Aggett from his cell on the second floor that morning;
- Dr. Aggett went through a 60 hour grilling between the 28 and 31 January. Statements made during this session and on the 3 February conflicted in their handwritten and typed versions, and that "dozens of pages" had been withheld by police because the information contained in them was under investigation;
- the security police might rearrest Dr. Liz Floyd because the statement she made whilst in detention before was inadequate.

Mr. Goerge Bizos submitted 13 affidavits by fellow detainees of Dr. Aggett's. The presiding magistrate, Mr. P. Kotze, agreed that 8 of these were admissible as evidence.

These 8 ex-detainees will give evidence when the inquest resumes on September 20.

DESCOM

KwaZulu workers under the Heel

THE February and March strikes at the KwaZulu Shoe factory, has highlighted appalling wage levels and problems in getting union recognition in so-called 'border' areas. The Loskop factory is a subsidiary of the giant Canadian-based multinational, Bata.

The first stoppage occurred at the factory on Feb. 22 when about 700 workers downed tools after one of their fellow workers had been fired.

The FOSATU-affiliated National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), which

had just begun to organise in the area and had only just sent a letter of introduction to management, said the dismissed worker had complained of being burnt with hot rubber by her supervisor.

The union thought that management had got to hear of this and decided to dismiss the worker. The striking workers demanded her re-instatement and the recognition of the NUTW. The company claimed the worker had been warned a number of times for not doing her work properly and after the fifth warning she had been fired.

Obed Zuma, NUTW's general secretary, said workers were getting paid as little as R14 a week.

The factory, although situated only an hour's drive from the town of Estcourt, falls within the KwaZulu 'homeland'. As such, agreements of the National Industrial Council for the Leather Industry laying down minimum wages and work conditions do not apply to the KwaZulu Shoe factory because 'it is not in South Africa'.

A Durban spokesman for the Council said the R14 a week that Loskop workers claimed they were being paid was well below the minimum laid down. 'Even a flicking worker, responsible for cutting out the uppers, was paid a minimum of R76,41 a week according to the agreement', he said.

Philip Kortzenberg, the senior liaison officer of the government-funded KwaZulu Development Corporation, which holds a third of the shares in the company, said the company's primary objective was to provide work in the rural areas. It could not do this if it had to adhere to the minimum wages laid down for metropolitan areas by the various industrial councils.

'We try to make sure the workers get an adequate wage', Kortzenberg said.

On Feb 24, after being approached by management, community councillors addressed workers, urging them to return to work. The workers refused.

They considered their decision after a meeting with 'Prof' Sineke, organiser for NUTW, and returned to work the next day. None of their demands were met and throughout the stoppage management refused to deal with the union.

On Mar 12 the entire workforce again downed tools after one of the members of a workers' committee, formed after the previous strike, was fired.

The union said that after this strike the workers' committee had been called in by management and had their photographs taken. They had then been continually harassed.

The workers demanded re-instatement of the committee member and again demanded recognition of the NUTW.

This time KwaZulu's Minister for the Interior, Dr F Mdlalose, agreed to mediate in the dispute after he had been approached by the union.

Attempts made by the department's chief labour officer, Mr Z A Khanyile, to arrange a meeting between management and the workers were unsuccessful. Dr Mdlalose then summoned management to Ulundi to discuss the dispute.

Workers had begun to drift back to work at this stage, but the majority came out again on the strength of Dr Mdlalose's intervention which was broadcast over Radio Zulu.

Mr Khanyile, following the meeting at Ulundi, went back to the factory and held a meeting between worker representatives and management. It was then agreed to rehire workers on a staggered basis. The strikers decided to return to work on April 14.

But, Dr Mdlalose said management would not be able to take on the full compliment of workers because the stoppages had meant the cancelation of number of orders.

It has been difficult to gauge how many union members have been re-employed because of the staggered rehiring of workers.

On going to press the NUTW had not made any further progress in gaining recognition at the KwaZulu Shoe factory. One of the union's organisers, Alec Erwin, will be raising the issue at the Canadian Labour Congress to be held at the end of May and at the same time will be lodging a formal complaint with the Canadian government and the ILO.

IAN BISSEL, Durban, APRIL.

IC's ideal for reactionary unionists - Kagan

THE Industrial Council system is increasingly becoming a focus of debate in the labour movement. The majority of independent unions support the decision of the Langa Conference in August 1981 - that the present IC system is an unacceptable means of collective bargaining.

However, unionists are coming under enormous pressure from employers organisations, such as Seifsa, to participate in the IC's.

Morris Kagan, a veteran trade unionist, caused a minor stir when he raised criticisms of the industrial councils at the last TUCSA conference. SALB

interviewed him to find out his opinions, based on his years of participation in the IC system.

"The industrial councils as institutions" have not behaved in a way which makes the bulk of the workforce in this country accept their impartiality - the average worker gets the impression they are pro-employer," he says.

The majority of designated council agents (inspectors) "prefer the point of view of the employer" particularly when dealing with black workers. They are not seen to be impartial partly because of the fact that they are always white. Not a single black inspector is known to exist, although the vast majority of workers are black.

A further criticism which Kagan makes is that "the employers, willy nilly, dominate the industrial council machinery". In a few cases the chairmanship of the Council rotates between unions and employers. But these are the exceptions.

"You will not find one where the secretary of the IC is also the secretary of the union". The secretary of the employers organisation also being secretary of the IC is a common occurrence.

The system appears to have got to the stage where it is largely run as a friendly discussion forum between the employers organisations and bureaucratic trade union officials.

Kagan gave examples of practices which abound:

- In the bulk of IC's the secretary simply appoints the agents himself whereas this is intended to be a matter for consultations between unions and employers.
- When it comes to the 'secrecy clause' which applies to all who attend IC sessions, Kagan claims "certain reactionary union leaders" deliberately misuse this clause "not to go back to the workers about the agreements they negotiate, because they say these are confidential".

This is ammunition for those who oppose the IC system. But Kagan rejects this view and makes a point of distinguishing between the principles of the system, "which are fine", and the actual functioning of the majority of councils. For Kagan, the problem is the unionists who operate the system.

Why do they operate it so badly? Kagan answers forthrightly: Because they're bad trade unionists. Because they haven't got guts, because they haven't the perception and because they haven't got a plan. They're trade unionists without a plan. They don't know what they're in society for".

But is it simply the case that bad unionists are operating a good system?

A point which Kagan makes, and which most trade unionists accept, is that it is important to distinguish between the intention of the IC Act and its actual possibilities for the democratic trade union movement.

He is aware that when Minister of Labour Creswell introduced the Act in 1924 the aims included preventing undercutting of the big firms by the 'sweatshops' and encouraging the incorporation and bureaucratisation of the trade union leadership. The Act was an attempt to regulate class conflict.

Kagan says bureaucratisation need not occur. "It's up to the union leaders to maintain their militance". At the same time he admits that the system itself has contributed to this not occurring. "It's an ideal system for reactionary, lazy, good-for-nothing trade union leadership".

But even if one does not reject IC's 'in principle', does it follow that it is therefore correct to participate in them? Kagan advocates participation for two reasons:

- It is not practical for a trade union to negotiate hundreds of agreements, particularly in industries where there are a multitude of employers.
- IC agreements can be made binding on all employers in an industry and therefore minimum wage levels and conditions can be enforced. The IC's are therefore, for Kagan, a practical vehicle for regulating relations between employers and employees, and participation in them is worthwhile.

Yet much that he says appears to reinforce those opposed to participation.

Kagan says the IC's cannot simply be shaped at will, like putty. They are long established bodies run by employers and union with established interests and established patterns of working. None of the existing parties are particularly sympathetic to the position of black workers. Simply to enter the IC's and use them "as instruments of struggle", as Kagan suggests, is not without its disadvantages.

The whole system works on the basis of consensus between a majority of both employers and employees. The union side of the councils is likely to be split along racial and craft lines. On certain issues the employers may be divided. "But on basic issues such as wages, they never split. No matter how much they hate each other...the class unity asserts itself on major issues",

he says.

Even to change IC's as they exist, takes "some fighting". For example, if the employers decide to defend an existing secretary, he can only be got rid of by "causing an upheaval - it means threatening to dissolve the council". This requires a lot of time and energy from the union.

The independent union movement will have to weigh up the issues carefully, balancing the advantages of participation against the disadvantages. And if they hold out against industrial councils, are they likely to win a more favourable form of industry-wide bargaining?

J. BASKIN, Jhb., Mar 25

Clothing workers take own action

IN February and March about 1 800 African and 'coloured' workers went on strike in at least 20 clothing factories on the Witwatersrand. The stoppages lasted from a few hours to 2-3 days. Workers demands were uniform - a R3 immediate wage increase.

In most cases the unions representing the workers, the National Union of Clothing Workers (African) and the Garment Workers Union ('coloureds' and whites) were called in to settle the disputes. Each time workers received or were promised some form of monetary increase. In 10 cases workers received wage increases ranging from R2 - R4 per week. In other instances, however, employers refused to grant wage increases but were prepared to raise either attendance or production bonuses.

Attendance bonuses (forfeited if a worker is half-an-hour late in any one week) are set at R1 for an unqualified worker and R1,50 for a qualified worker, although some employers pay more. Increases in attendance bonuses ranged from R1,50 to R5 and production bonuses were increased to R5.

The stoppages had a ripple effect throughout the industry with other employers granting their workers a R3 increase to avoid the outbreak of work stoppages at their factories.

Coming on the eve of wage negotiations at Industrial Council level in the Transvaal clothing industry, the stoppages raise the question of the effectiveness of the council system in meeting workers' needs.

There can be little doubt that the constraints on wage increases set out in the 1979 IC agreement have been the major contributing factor to the worker unrest in the industry. The agreement laid down set wage rates for

the three years to 1982.

It allowed for a 7,5% increase in 1979-80, a further 7,5% in 1980-81 and a 5% increase in 1981-82. Thus a qualified machinist's wage rose to R26,35 per week from September 1979 to June 1980, to R28,20 from July 1 1980 to June 30 1981, and R29,40 to July 1982.

Given that at the time the agreement was negotiated the inflation rate was about 14% and showed no sign of abating, the parties to the IC were in effect negotiating wages for the following three years which would lead to a real drop in workers' wages.

Workers have voiced their dissatisfaction with this by striking in the early months of each year for the last three years. It is in these months that workers feel the financial pinch most: they return from the holiday break with little money and have to face expenses such as school fees in addition to normal price increases.

Also the first few months tend to be slack periods in the industry which, as opposed to the months leading up to Christmas, do not enable workers to augment their wages by working overtime.

Worker dissatisfaction led to the unions seeking remedy to the situation and resulted in interim agreements being reached in 1980 and 1981 which amended the main agreement. In 1980 the unions negotiated a 10% increase instead of the 7,5% set out in the 1979 agreement (they originally asked for 12,5%); in 1981 an 11,5% increase was agreed to instead of the 5% due, with the agreement coming into effect in April rather than in July. This brought a qualified machinist's wage to a still low R33 per week. Machinists form the bulk of the workforce.

This year, however, employers turned down a union request for an interim wage increase to meet the rise in the cost of living. And it was this decision which seems to have been the main factor in precipitating the recent worker unrest. The unions have stated that in future they will negotiate wages on a yearly basis only.

The issue highlights the problems inherent in a system which sets minimum wages only and which excludes any possibility of workers' wages being augmented by negotiations at plant level. The problem is exacerbated when these minima are as low as those in the clothing industry. As a result workers are forced through the medium of strike action to 'negotiate' a better deal for themselves over and above the wages set down in the IC agreement.

On a broader level one must ask why the unions have been party to

agreements which have allowed for such poor increases on prescribed minima. The unions themselves give two interrelated reasons for this: The economic constraints governing the clothing industry and the intransigence of employers at the negotiating table.

Unions say they have been unable to ask for increases in line with the rise in the cost of living as this would have adversely affected the industry in the Transvaal. Transvaal employers, it is argued, find themselves increasingly unable to compete with clothing employers in other parts of the country. Homeland and border area employers are exempt from wage regulating measures which enables them to pay a much lower wage than Transvaal employers.

In some Natal areas the wage paid is one-third of that paid in the Transvaal. Hours of work are shorter in this area where a 40-hour week is worked as opposed to a $42\frac{1}{2}$ -hour week in the Cape and a 45-hour week in Babalegi.

In the past the quota system on the Witwatersrand, which set the ratio of African to white workers ($5:2\frac{1}{2}$) also placed the Transvaal industry in a disadvantaged position. These and other constraints led to about 30 factories moving premises from the Transvaal to border and other areas since 1953.

Employers also face competition from foreign countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Zimbabwe which produce goods far more cheaply than do SA factories.

The unions say that they have been loath to push for increases which would have led to the further decentralisation of factories from the Transvaal, or to insolvencies as this would have led to unemployment amongst workers in the industry. (There were 17 insolvencies in 1979 alone).

The unions' stand leads one to ask the question - whose interests are the unions serving?

It is not at all clear that factories would close if wages were increased; and in any case closure would not lead to large scale unemployment as machinists are generally in short supply.

The weakness of the unions' argument is illustrated by their demand this year for increases of up to 50%.

However, not only have the unions asked for lower starting wages, they have also compromised on these demands to reach a settlement with employers.

Unions say that they are forced to do this and have no other option. Wage negotiations have tended to end in deadlock with employers then

refusing to go to arbitration leaving the unions with the option of calling a legal strike or giving in to employer demands. And workers, they say, have been reluctant to strike.

It is not possible to test this claim, but there is no doubt that the unions have shown a cautious attitude to striking, especially where strikes are wildcat ones. This year, for instance, Dr. Anna Scheepers of the Garment Workers Union appealed to striking workers "not to take things into their own hands". She said, "It is illegal to strike and by doing so you put yourselves and the union in a difficult position. The unions are about to negotiate a new agreement which will of course cover all factories. Until then workers should not do anything to disrupt the industry and undermine their own case. Above all, workers must not think they can strike and negotiate their own increase over, and above the union increase".

The irony is that it has been this worker action which has led employers to grant interim increases and that workers have reached a point where they are prepared to 'take things into their own hands' to ensure they do get more substantial increases.

Johannesburg Researchers, Mar 25

List of Strike hit factories

<u>Factory</u>	<u>No. of workers on strike</u>	<u>Factory</u>	<u>No. on strike</u>
Elmar (cutting Dept.)	+ 30 workers	Adonis Knitwear	+ 200 workers
Jays	Unknown	Remarque Wear	+ 150 workers
Lovable	Unknown	RMB Dress	Unknown
Pride Knit	+ 200 workers	Suki Crawford	+ 40 workers
Ram Sam Clothing	+ 30 - 60 workers	Tesnam	+ 40 workers
Elmar Clothing	+ 200 - 300 workers	S M Nudulman	+ 42 workers
Lesero	+ 70 - 80 workers	J C Belts	5 workers
Navada	+ 200 - 300 workers	Braeder Belts	+ 30 - 40 workers
SA Weatherwear	+ 100 workers	C M T Undies	+ 6 workers
Henochsberg	+ 475 - 500 workers	Blue Line	+ 60 workers

Seifsa's Strike Guidelines

CONFIDENTIAL strike-handling guidelines have been produced by the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation (Seifsa).

Described as "a contingency plan to handle labour unrest" the guidelines

emerged as a response to the strike wave in the metal industry in the latter half of last year.

Some of the more important aspects of the guidelines are:

- it may be necessary "to live with a stoppage" until a negotiating body has been appointed by workers and the nature of their grievances is known.
- workers must be assured that there will be no victimisation of worker representatives and that these representatives will be given an opportunity to report back to workers.
- protection must be provided for workers who do not want to participate in strike action and who face intimidation.
- contact must be maintained with police at senior level when the strike continues. Police intervention, however, must be seen as a last resort.
- if a return to work is agreed to by workers and management, then management must implement the terms of the return to work with the minimum of delay.

The more controversial aspects of the guidelines are

- workers must be told that management will negotiate with worker representatives only if they return to work.
- if workers refuse to return to work and the strike continues, employers should set a deadline for strikers to return to work. Workers will be considered dismissed if they do not return to work by the stipulated deadline.
- if the "dismissed" workers ignore instructions not to be on company property, the police must be called.
- no attempts should be made to "prescribe" which representatives are acceptable to management. Where trade unions are involved and labour unrest is apparent, the union organisers should be contacted immediately.

Seifsa director, Sam van Coller, has stressed that the strike guidelines were there to advise employers rather than to pressure them into a course of action. The recent strike wave in the metal industry on the East Rand, in the first three months of this year showed that most employers acted consistently with some aspects of the guidelines.

Most employers indicated that they would only negotiate grievances with workers once they returned to work. Recently in only four of the 20 East Rand strikes where workers came out for higher wages were small increases given after workers returned to work.

Where the dispute was not around wages, the issue was resolved, except

briefings

in one instance, before a return to work.

In some factories MAWU achieved trade union recognition through the strike. Most employers set deadlines to the workforce and regarded workers as having "resigned" if these ultimatums were not met. In almost all instances, second deadlines were set and a majority of the workers taken back. However, selective re-employment has resulted in the victimisation of worker leaders. There has been a distinctly low police presence, particularly in the Wadeville /Boksburg area.

Union response to the strike guidelines had varied. CUSA has welcomed the guidelines saying they "reflect a willingness on the part of the employers to defuse tensions rather than confront", and MAWU also sees the general move to negotiation rather than confrontation as positive.

MAWU noted the low police presence in the recent East Rand strikes. It felt that employer/employee disputes should be solved by them without the intervention of the police. This viewpoint was supported by GWU.

While MAWU acknowledged that in many instances employers did attempt to find the real grievances in the strike situation, together with GWU, they felt that some employers still believe in the "agitator" theory, and this showed a disregard for the real issues causing labour unrest.

David Sibabi, MAWU general secretary, points to inflation as the main reason for the recent labour unrest, and strongly denied that strikes are the work of "instigators".

The tactic of dismissing and then re-employing selectively was also criticised by MAWU which said that this served to intimidate workers.

GWU felt that the workers' right to withhold their labour is fundamental in any industrial relations system. Yet the strike guidelines, by promoting employers not to negotiate with workers till they return to work, denies workers this right.

GWU's comment points to the most central criticism of the Seifsa position; it results in an intensification, rather than a defusion of the conflict situation.

Although the guidelines recommend that negotiations start as soon as workers return to work, this has not happened in the East Rand strikes earlier this year. Thus the strike guidelines have to be seen in relation to Seifsa's industrial relations guidelines which reject plant level bargaining on wages.

Most employers have insisted that wage negotiation can only take place

at the Industrial Council. However, even among employers there does not seem to be consensus on the viability of the IC system in its present form. GWU, on signing their second recognition agreement outside the IC at Consani's Engineering in Cape Town commented that their success indicated "the division within Seifsa and the dissatisfaction of the more progressive employers". Some employers, aware of the production losses and the successful claims for damages incurred in strike action last year (e.g. Rely Precision) are prepared to listen to the workers at plant level to prevent further unrest and losses.

MAWU claimed that a regional Seifsa meeting in March this year, at which labour unrest on the Rand was discussed, Barlow Rand encouraged a more "pragmatic" approach, while Anglo Seifsa favoured a more hardline view. MAWU also said that the "hardliners" were taking production losses to maintain the Anglo/ Seifsa ideological line.

At the same time, Seifsa is aware that if it wants the IC to be viable it has to become much more responsible to the voice of the shop floor and to the employers who are "going it alone" outside the Council. Because of this Seifsa is presently getting opinions from all sectors of the union movement about possible changes to the industrial council.

While divisions exist among employers, the shop floor in the recent stoppages, has been unified in its demand for higher wages and in its rejection of industrial councils.

The strength and determination of the workers in the face of much harsher action from employers, shows, on the one hand, that the problem of inflation is reaching "record levels" and, on the other, that there is a growing awareness among workers of their collective power through strong shop floor organisation.

SHIRLEEN MOTALA, Jhb., May.

Relying on the Police

THE Rely Precision strike and its lengthy aftermath is an interesting example of what has been a common response to industrial action - the urgent phone call to the local police station.

On 26 May 1980 the entire work force of 55 workers at Rely Precision Casting Foundries walked off the job. The immediate cause of the stoppage was the refusal of management to discuss the dismissal of a worker. The

entire work force were members of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), a union, management had consistently refused to recognise.

During a long and acrimonious series of "negotiations" with a workers' committee management had called on the assistance of officials from both the Department of Manpower and Seifsa.(1) The history of the struggle inside the factory was chronicled in the play "Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi" which has been discussed in SALB Vol 6 No 6 and Vol 6 No 8.

After leaving the factory the workers congregated outside it on the open grounds. What happened subsequently can be gathered from the evidence of the workers in a civil case that arose out of the strike:

"On this particular day our intention was to discuss with our employer. The police then arrived. The police then surrounded us and we were inside the circle which they formed. They then got their revolvers ready and instructed us to get into the police vehicle which was on the premises... Before we entered the truck the chairman of our workers' committee appeared and he requested to speak to the person in charge of the police. The chairman then explained that we were sitting there waiting to discuss with our employer. Then the policemen went to our employer. Before he could reach our employer a Department of Manpower official appeared there and he told this police officer that we must be locked up".

The workers were forced into a police van and transported to the Boksburg Police Station. At the police station they were removed from the police van individually and the first 40 to be removed were assaulted by groups of policemen. The policemen were dressed in uniforms, overalls and civilian clothes. The workers were assaulted with batons and fists as well as being racially abused.

After the assault the workers were all placed in a large cell and later removed to Cinderella Prison. They were held there overnight and released on bail the next morning. They were later charged with taking part in an illegal strike and convicted and fined R60 or 60 days each and six months suspended for three years.

The union organiser had attempted to gain access to the workers at the police station, but this was refused. Later that day a union organiser and a lawyer were allowed to talk briefly to the workers at the prison and in the morning a doctor was allowed to examine the workers and make a record of their injuries.

A number of workers laid charges against the Police for assault but stopped doing this when they realised that the policeman taking the statements was, in fact, one of their assailants.

Later an investigation was conducted by the Kempton Park Police but none of the policemen was ever brought to court on assault charges.

The 40 workers who were assaulted sued the Minister of Police (as the employer of the policemen) for damages arising out of the assaults. The case was heard in the Boksburg Magistrate's Court in Jan and Mar and worker after worker was called to give evidence on the assaults.

They described in detail the nature of the assaults they received, the pain and the humiliation they felt as a result of the assaults and the racial abuse. The effect of the evidence was overwhelming. The police were forced to settle. Each worker would receive payment, the amount being determined by the severity of his injuries. Altogether R9 575 was paid to the 33 workers who were present in court to press their case.

This money was handed out to the workers at a ceremony in the Fosatu offices in Benoni on Sun Apr 7. Amidst cries of "Amandla", each worker came forward to receive his cheque. Most were awarded R215 compensation, while the highest amount, R750, was awarded to Obed Mbele who had received a severe cut on the head.

The presentation was followed by a video showing of the play, Ilanga, produced by Rely workers in conjunction with Junction Avenue Theatre Group (JATG). The play has been a crucial part of FOSATU's attempt to publicize the struggle of Rely workers. Its authenticity as a presentation of the struggle at Rely was demonstrated by the enthusiastic identification of the workers present with Ilanga.

The ceremony developed into a discussion of the lessons of Rely.

The first and most immediate point that speakers made was that the police had been taught a lesson. Our victory, they said, was that we had stopped workers being beaten up by police in Boksburg. In fact provision exists in police regulations in cases such as these for the money to be recovered from the salaries of the individual policemen involved in the assault.

The regional secretary, Rodney Nwambe, commented afterwards that this case was a serious warning to the police not to intervene in strikes. It was the union's belief, he said, that the police and the state had no role in management-worker relations.

The second lesson they drew from Rely was that the bosses needed them. The bosses have learnt, they said, that contract workers were not simply rubbish that could be thrown away. When management dismissed the Rely workers they were told by the East Rand Administration Board to employ local workers. But the 'locals' would not stay at Rely because they did not like working in foundries and management has been forced to re-employ them. So far 22 of the 40 who were assaulted by the police are now back at Rely.

The meeting concluded with workers emphasizing the importance of organising inside the foundry. Rely, they said, was the first of the wave of nearly 50 strikes in the metal industry in the East Rand over the last two years. The bosses, they said, have learnt from these strikes to negotiate with MAWU.

Johannesburg Correspondent, MAY 1.

East Rand stoppages continue

SEVENTEEN stoppages took place in the East Rand metal industry, 15 of them in Wadeville. Three other earlier stoppages made a total of 20 stoppages in the first three months of 1982.

The central demand in 18 of these stoppages was for an increase in the minimum wage. In most cases a demand for an increase of R1 to R2 an hour was made.

Inflation, workers argued, had cut into their wage packets and they had to work increasingly longer overtime hours to retain their level of wages. With an average increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 17,66% between January and November 1981, a worker, on the basis of the University of Port Elizabeth's Household Effective Level (HEL), would have to earn R77,75 per week to meet the minimum needs required to live above the bread-line on the East Rand. Thus a worker earning the current industrial council minimum in engineering of R1,13 an hour on a 45-hour week would be R26,90 short of the HEL every day.(1)

A rough distinction can be drawn between stoppages that function as a genuine trial of strength and those which are little more than a token demonstration.(2) Whereas the stoppages analysed in the East Rand metal industry in the second half of last year would be classified as demonstration stoppages, the new stoppages are now taking the characteristics of a trial of strength.(3) For example, the 1982 stoppages were longer (2½ days) than the

1981 stoppages (1 3/4 days on average).

Whereas the 1981 study, shows that 50% of the demands were over the reinstatement of dismissed workers and were met in full in most of the cases, in the current stoppages similar demands in only 20% (4 cases) were partly or fully met. In the majority of cases (60%) management refused to negotiate, gave workers a deadline to return to work and selectively re-hired those who did return.(4) While this meant, on a number of occasions, that all workers were re-hired, it was, of course, on management's unilateral terms without the initial grievance being removed.

However, the demand for wages was to develop into a more central issue when management refused to negotiate wages at plant level, insisting on bargaining through the highly centralised national Industrial Council for the Engineering Industry.

Clearly the battle lines are now being drawn for a contest over the nature of industrial relations in the engineering industry. Initially only a third of the factories involved in the stoppages had a majority of workers belonging to the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU). Five had no members in MAWU at all.

However, in the course of the stoppage MAWU membership was to increase significantly in those factories where stoppages had taken place. A key affiliate in the largest predominantly black union federation FOSATU, MAWU had rejected the IC's offer to attend as an observer at the annual wage negotiations that began on Mar 9. The union made it clear that the present IC structure was unrepresentative and it favoured plant level bargaining.

The employers, through their organisation Seifsa, have on the other hand, advised their members not to bargain on wages outside the industrial council system. While at least two companies in the current stoppages broke ranks and gave limited wage increases, the key battle is yet to come. With the exception of McKechnie Brothers, the companies involved are small to medium sized firms - they averaged 223 workers - and the large firms remained untouched by the current wave of stoppages.

Historically, the established unions have neglected the lower paid (black) workers by using the IC to promote their separate interests as a privileged stratum of the South African working class. This year, in an attempt to bring all the emerging unions into the industrial council, the established unions made a demand for R1,75 an hour, rising to R2 by the end of this year.

In fact management were to reject these demands and the IC negotiations have been postponed for a further month. But even if management were to concede these demands, this would miss the point. The underlying cause of the unprecedented number of stoppages in the metal industry is the limited scope for workplace bargaining.

Where bargaining is highly centralised, as in the engineering industry, plant level grievances over the size of national pay settlements can have an explosive affect on industrial relations.

A trial of strength can best be avoided if mechanisms are provided for a speedy resolution of conflict on the shop floor. Management's tough 'no negotiations' stand over the last fortnight may give employers the superficial feeling of having regained control over a refractory workforce, but it will be a short term victory.

In an industry covering over 400 000 workers, some form of industry-wide bargaining may be inevitable, but employers would be wise to think more carefully on their response to the demands put forward in the current stoppages.

The lesson of the last decade in the engineering industry is clear. Attempts to create and reproduce institutions that do not have the support of the majority of the workers in the factory will surely fail.

E. WEBSTER, Jhb., Mar 25

Footnotes:

- 1 This is calculated on the basis of Prof J.F. Potgieter's (UPE) Household Effective Level figure of R307,20 per month for a lower income family in Benoni with the average increase in the CPI added to it.
- 2 R. Hyman, *Strikes*. Fontana, 1972, pp.19-24
- 3 *Stoppages in the East Rand Metal Industry July-November 1981*
- 4 This, apparently, was the advice given by the employer organisation, Seifsa, in its confidential memo released on strike handling, RDM 12.3.1982
- 5 Negotiations deadlocked when the employer's offer was rejected by the established unions. RDM 10.3.1982

Note: It is not always clear in the stoppages whether the workers are demanding R2 an hour increase or R2 an hour minimum.

The 1981 East Rand Strike Wave

Jeremy Baskin

In the 5 months July to November 1981, the East Rand was the scene of more than 50 strikes involving almost 25 000 workers.(1) It is one of the areas in the country where unionism has grown fastest. This article is an attempt to examine some of the features of that strike wave. Although the focus of the strikes was in the Germiston-Benoni-Brakpan area, the article includes discussion on the East Rand as a whole and covers occasional strikes as far afield as Springs, Olifantsfontein and Steeldale.

Roughly half the strikes involved workers organised by the FOSATU affiliated Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU). Other FOSATU unions, in the chemical, food, textile, paper and transport sectors, were also involved to a much lesser extent. CUSA-affiliated unions in the chemical and construction industries were connected with three strikes. The independent commercial workers union (CCAWUSA) was linked with one stoppage, whilst the African Food and Canning Workers Union (AFCWU) had members come out in two major stoppages. In addition, a few of the recorded strikes occurred in places with no known union presence.

The East Rand, built on the gold mining industry, has become one of the

major centres of the metal and engineering industry in the country. Companies such as Dunswart Iron & Steel, Dorbyl Engineering, Scaw Metals and Salcast can be found in the area, alongside smaller engineering firms. Factories, both big and small, multinational and local, and covering most sectors of industry, are also to be found. A major employer in the area is still the Rand Mines-owned ERPM gold mine in Boksburg.

The workers themselves come from different areas. The white employees mostly live in the residential parts of town or on mine property. Black workers are housed in a number of townships which fall under the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB). A significant proportion of the workers, especially in heavy and dangerous metal jobs, are contract workers who are mostly housed in hostels in townships like Vosloorus and Tembisa.

This article does not aim to detail every event. Instead it examines some of the features of the strike wave as a whole. Strikes themselves are not the sum total of labour activity and organisation. They are simply the most dramatic manifestation of conflict between management and labour. Other worker action, such as go-slows and refusals to work overtime, accompanied the strike wave, although these incidents are not examined here. Further, this article does not comprehensively detail numerous very brief stoppages which occurred. These limitations should be borne in mind.

The focus here is on the background causes of the strike wave coupled with analysis of the issues which precipitated such action. Attention is also directed to the way in which the strikes spread and the respective roles of the unions and the state.

General Causes

The East Rand strikes were the result of general as much as particular workers' grievances. These will be dealt with in turn.

Generally inflation was exerting pressure on workers' wages. Massive price increases, particularly of basic foodstuffs, came into effect during the year. In August, for example, the bread price rose by 30-40%. Bus fare increases affecting workers from Daveyton, Wattville, Katlehong and Vosloorus were announced in June and July. There were also widespread rent increases in the 12 months preceding the strike wave. An indication of the looming dissatisfaction was shown by the protests and rioting which occurred in April following rent increases in Tembisa. The East Rand Administration Board

(ERAB) and the local Community Council had agreed upon increases of almost 30% for rented houses and 70% for hostel dwellers. Inflation officially running at 14,6 in the 12 months to June '1981, had an even greater effect on the working classes. This was largely because of the especially high inflation rate for basic items of expenditure (food, clothing, transport, rent) and because growing unemployment meant that breadwinners have more people to support than in the past. It has been estimated that the level of inflation which the lower income groups experience is twice as high as the official Consumer Price Index (CPI).(2) The result was that East Rand workers were feeling the financial squeeze keenly and they needed substantial pay increases simply in order to keep up with inflation.

Contract workers, who account for approximately 30% of East Rand workers (3), were being especially squeezed. In addition to the common problems of exploitation which they share with other workers, contract workers were also being confronted with additional burdens from two other directions. On the one hand, the small rural subsistence base which they still possess was being further eroded, particularly in KwaZulu which was experiencing the worst drought in memory, and which suffers from massive and growing unemployment. A high proportion of workers from the strike-hit metal industry come from remote and drought devastated areas of KwaZulu.(4)

On the other hand, migrants are being increasingly squeezed from the cities by the influx control laws and their especially rigid application by the ERAB. With more and more people coming onto the labour market, contract workers are confronted with ERAB clamping down on 'illegal' workers, cutting down on the proportion of jobs available to contract workers, and no longer allowing them to transfer or take up contracts in the urban areas.

One hostel dweller expressed the overall situation graphically: "The countryside is pushing you in the cities to survive, the cities are pushing you in the countryside to die... The drought is coming to the cities". (5) It is not surprising that migrants adopted a particularly militant attitude during the strike wave. Webster and Sitas have estimated that 60% of workers involved in these strikes which occurred in the metal industry (approximately half of the total) were contract workers.(6)

Another background cause which can be identified is the growth of the independent trade union movement. Later the role which unions played in the strike wave will receive closer scrutiny. Here one need only mention that worker interest in trade unionism has been increasing.

The level of dissatisfaction is high and workers have realised that they need to organise if they are to achieve anything of worth. On the East Rand alone the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) a significant organisational force in the area claims a membership increase of 50% during 1981 with a total of 25 000 members signed up by the end of that year. One unionist said that the workers organise themselves and come to the union offices. "We don't have to go to factories to recruit these days". Similarly, the significant growth of the AFCWU in the area, has been a phenomenon of the last two years. The growth of the unions should be seen as both a cause and a consequence of a growing worker militancy and self-confidence.

The general political climate is also an important consideration. In the Transvaal, particularly, 1981 was a year of heightened militancy. Apart from the wave of strikes which occurred, there were also numerous protests in the communities over rents and other issues. Mobilisation against the community councils was particularly strong in Daveyton. Tembisa hostel dwellers protested violently against rent increases. Politically, there was much publicity surrounding campaigns such as anti-Republic Day and anti-S.A. Indian Council. Increased ANC activity was apparent including actions by armed guerillas. The period saw the 'progressives' gain ground in opposition to a narrowly defined 'black consciousness'. The components of the 'progressive' ideology were working-class leadership of the national liberation movement, mass mobilisation / organisation, and non-racialism. This was a political position with which almost all the trade unions on the East Rand found it easy to sympathise. It was a position which gained ground even within the black-consciousness AZAPO's East Rand branches, as a result of growing worker membership there. The political climate of 1981 was an important background factor not only because of the high level of militancy but also because, for the first time in many years, a 'progressive' trade union movement was complemented by the hegemony of a 'progressive' political ideology.

Immediate Causes

The factors outlined above made the East Rand situation volatile. But it caught ablaze for more specific reasons. Webster and Sitas, in their study of the strikes in the metal industry during this period, found that "arbitrary control by management was the central demand in the majority of

stoppages".(7) This conclusion is true for the strike wave as a whole. In well over half of the known strikes the central demands concerned questions of management control: the unfair dismissal of fellow workers or shop stewards; the arbitrary actions of certain foremen; the demand that worker representatives who had been 'bought' be removed, and changes in the work-load required by management. About one-third of the strikes revolved around wages or related issues, whilst about 10% concerned demands that management recognise a particular trade union. The significance of these figures is that they reflect the increasingly sophisticated strike action which black workers are now undertaking. Struggle is occurring over issues which were previously the undisputed prerogative of management. It is worth examining more carefully the specific cause of grievances which sparked off the strikes.

Wages

Inflation made wage increases necessary if workers were to maintain their living standards, to say nothing of improving their conditions. For this reason demands occurred in all sectors - paper, metal, chemicals, food. Many of the demands centred around calls for a 'living wage' of R2 per hour. However, in no case was this demand won. Instead it was common for workers to return to work after having been granted either a small increase in hourly rates or an attendance bonus. In some factories management responded with no concessions. At Triomf Fertilizer (Chloorkop), workers stopped work demanding a 35% pay increase. Management refused to talk to the strikers and all 500 were immediately dismissed.

Many of the wage strikes occurred in the immediate aftermath of the new Industrial Council agreement for the metal industry, which came into effect at the beginning of July. The agreement set a new minimum rate of R1,13 per hour, and granted most black workers 20-23% increases over the agreement of the previous year.(8) Inflation between these two agreements ran officially at 14,6%, but if we remember that Keenan's estimates put the level for workers at twice that, then it becomes obvious that the agreement was totally inadequate.(9)

The experience of Hendler and Hendler workers repeated itself in various guises at a number of metal factories. MAWU had been organising at this large Boksburg factory, and had finally been recognised by management in

May 1981 after winning 90% of the votes in a referendum. The shop stewards had immediately started negotiating for the demand of a 50c per hour increase. When the new IC agreement emerging from negotiations where these workers were not represented resulted in a 21c per hour increase, there was general unhappiness. The workers called on management to explain, and when they refused to attend a general meeting the workers struck. Two thousand workers downed tools for three days, beginning 15 July. MAWU and the shop stewards decided to call for a return to work after management agreed to negotiate. Although no basic increases were won, management conceded payment of a R5 attendance bonus. An increase of 7c per hour which was announced by management in September was doubtless a further consequence of the strike.

At Hendler & Hendler the workers were not only unhappy with an inadequate increase but also with the fact that it had not been negotiated with them. Thus the strong opposition to Industrial Councils amongst the independent unions received expression.

Union Recognition

Although only about 10% of the strikes revolved around questions of union recognition, the dispute over this issue was of great importance at one factory in particular, Colgate-Palmolive. The Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), affiliated to FOSATU, first approached management for recognition in early 1980. Management finally agreed to recognise the Union in August 1981 after a protracted dispute involving a lengthy exchange of correspondence, discussions between the union and the company, the threat of a legal strike, a boycott of Colgate products and finally, a 2 day strike.(10)

Many of the details of this dispute are of interest and are examined elsewhere in this article. What concerns us here is not simply that a recognition agreement was signed, since this is becoming increasingly common. Rather, what was important was the quality of recognition. The Colgate workers defeated a determined effort by management to force them onto the Industrial Council as a prerequisite for recognition. The fact that only 20 Colgate employees were covered by the agreement was relevant. More important was the workers' objection to the whole IC system as undemocratic, bureaucratic and an attempt to circumvent meaningful plant-level bargaining. When, after having agreed to negotiate, and after CWIU had called off its

boycott and its threatened strike and management continued to delay and bring up new problems, the workers came out on a two day strike. The workers were strong and organised enough to compel management to recognise the union on their own terms. An agreement was finally signed on the 21 August 1981.

A contrast was provided by two strikes at Johnson Tiles during late September and early October which revealed the dangers of weak organisation. Some 300 workers struck demanding recognition of the CUSA affiliated Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU). The union represented only 365 of the 860 workers at the firm and was therefore in a weak position. Management decided to dismiss some of the strikers and to re-employ selectively. The BCAWU suffered a defeat.

Management Control

The fact that the majority of strikes fall into this category is an indication that the labour movement has grown not only in size but also in quality. The range of issues which workers are prepared to take up has widened and the weapons at their disposal have increased. An example of the militancy which emerged was seen at Harvey Tiles, where a number of brief stoppages occurred. The workers made far-reaching demands on their own accord, and achieved some radical changes in the shop floor power structure. One successful demand was that supervisors be reduced to the ranks of ordinary workers. In addition, all proposed changes in production had first to be discussed at a general meeting of the workers. However, they eventually pushed too far, too fast and instead of consolidating their gains they were all dismissed following a dispute during December 1981 and January 1982.

Questions of production were raised elsewhere as demands. In early July, a strike in the relay adjusting dept. of the Telephone Manufacturers of South Africa (TMSA) occurred because workers felt production demands were too extensive. Management conceded. A similar incident occurred at Mine Steel Products in Boksburg when workers were dismissed after refusing to carry an extra heavy load. The remaining workers staged a brief strike and management backed down.

SCAW Metals, an Anglo-American owned factory, was the scene of a stoppage in October when six workers refused to join the closed shop Iron

Moulders Society. Challenging an old established 'craft' union in favour of the industrial union MAWU, they were all reinstated without joining the IMS. By asserting their right to join the union of their choice, they were indirectly challenging managerial power and confronting an undemocratic measure on the shop floor.

Arbitrary dismissals were one of the major causes of strikes. About 25 of the known stoppages during the strike wave concerned objections to dismissals. More than half of these stoppages resulted in reinstatements. Sometimes workers struck because of the dismissal of their leadership, as happened at Boksburg Foundry. At other times strikes broke out in order to challenge the unfair dismissal of fellow workers. The origins of the TMSA strike in October lay in an incident where three workers who had already knocked-off were dismissed for playing cards.

The question which arises is 'was there a sudden increase in the number of unfair dismissals'? Surely not. The threat and practice of dismissal are disciplinary measures most widely used by management. Unemployment is high and those who lose jobs face poor prospects. Management and supervisors use dismissal to maintain control and sustain a fearful attitude on the part of the workers. The reason for the large proportion of strikes contesting dismissals is not because there were more unfair dismissals than before, but because workers were prepared to challenge them. This can be seen as a function of their organisation on the one hand, and of the militant and self-confident mood engendered by the strike wave, on the other. As one worker expressed it: "The mood was tense, but we were no more prepared to take their shit".

In a variation of the above theme, workers struck on a number of occasions to demand the dismissal of someone. Some strikes revolved around the demand that foremen be dismissed, and T.M. Foundries saw a successful strike along these lines in September. In at least three cases (at Vaal Metals, Boksburg Foundry and Nickel Chrome) workers successfully demanded the dismissal of worker representatives whom they believed had been "bought-off" by management.(11) Webster and Sitas believe that managements were confronted with an increasingly powerful MAWU and resorted to attempts at co-opting leadership, in some cases by offering promotion to the chairman of the shop stewards' committee or giving access to training schemes provided by the firm.(12) However, a well-organised and aware workforce is quite capable of seeing-through and responding to managements' more sophisticated

industrial relations manoeuvres.

A significant feature of the strike wave was the resistance shown by workers to racist abuse from white foremen. The racial division of labour in South Africa has meant that conflicts between supervisors and workers have assumed the form of black-white clashes. Mostly the clashes are verbal, but at times they become physical. On a number of occasions strikes were the direct result of such clashes.

At SCAW Metals a fight between a black worker and a foreman led to the worker being dismissed. As a result, 2000 workers came out for 4 days demanding the reinstatement of their fellow worker. Management eventually conceded this and reinstated the worker, explaining that the Employer Association told them they could "no longer get away with dismissing a black worker when he assaulted a foreman who called him a kaffir".(13) At Hall, Longmore and Co., T.M. Foundries and at Henred Fruehauf workers struck successfully demanding the reinstatement of a colleague following similar incidents. Unsuccessful, however, was a strike at Gundle Plastics in August following a racist incident, and large numbers of workers were eventually dismissed. Where workers took a strong, organised stand on racist supervisors, they were almost always successful.

But not all actions were collective. One worker at Colgate was so angry at being called 'kaffir', that he took matters into his own hands and threw acid in the offender's face. As a Colgate shop steward explained: "we want to be treated as people not as commodities". Workers at that factory are continually confronted with racist supervisors (even death threats) and underhand attempts at keeping segregated facilities in what is claimed to be a non-racial company. "They say they are an equal opportunity employer", said one worker, "but people inside are crying". From the other side, a management source claimed that Colgate-Palmolive had the top rating amongst Sullivan Code signatories. But he refused to show a copy of the company's latest progress report to Dr. Sullivan, making verification of this claim impossible.

Extreme racist attitudes and actions can be found at all levels in most companies. Racism is not simply to be found amongst white workers and foremen. However the racism of white workers is notorious. It appears to be increasing in areas like the East Rand, because they are feeling threatened by the growth of black worker militancy and assertiveness. White workers are also finding their privileges undermined by some of the reforms the state has

been introducing in recent years. For example, blacks are now moving into a number of jobs that were previously guaranteed for whites. Also where there exist established grievance procedures and strong shop steward committees the arbitrary control that the supervisor once had over his 'boys' has diminished. Often the shop steward will go over his head and appeal against an official warning or a dismissal. The material and psychological effects of such actions is significant. A number of white workers have responded in a narrow fashion by joining ultra-rightwing groups. At Kelloggs, a number of the white staff appear to be active members of the HNP and Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB). At Colgate, Action Save White South Africa (ASWSA) initials have been appearing at the bottom of death threats to workers leaders.(14)

What the East Rand strikes show is that black workers are no longer prepared to let racist insults pass by, pretending not to notice them. This is largely the intrusion of growing political awareness from the community, into the factory. The way in which community, political and shop floor issues affect each other, highlights any attempt at placing barriers between these spheres, as unrealistic. Workers have combined a growing dignity with strong organisation and the self-confidence to take a stand against racist supervisors.

How the Strikes Spread

There were rumblings of discontent in June. Boksburg saw 600 workers at a local dairy strike over a dismissal and at Springs there was conflict at Stag Packaging. Two issues were to prove of major importance. Firstly, events at Colgate had been brewing for some months. The boycott was being launched and FOSATU-organised workers in the area were seeing the looming battle as important for the region as a whole. Anger at Colgate management's intransigence was growing. Secondly, the inadequate increases which the new metal agreement introduced in July, affected large numbers of workers in the metal-dominated East Rand.

Workers at Colgate-Palmolive struck on 14 July. "People saw a victorious strike", one shop steward said, "and they were inspired". This tendency for strikes to spread by example as well as geographically was most noticeable at the outset. A strike of 2000 workers over wages occurred at the MAWU organised Salcast (AMF) factory in the week preceding Colgate. The days

following the Colgate strike saw workers striking at the nearby factories of Hendler and Hendler, Bisonboard, Langeburg Co-op and Vaal Metals. A major strike by about 4000 workers protesting against inadequate wages and a new death benefit scheme occurred amongst workers at the Boksburg E.R.P.M. gold mine. A similar geographical spread of strikes occurred later at Wadeville.

At Bisonboard workers demanded a wage increase of R1 per hour, not because negotiations were due but because of developments in neighbouring factories - Langeburg Co-op and Hendler and Hendler are situated across the road. The 'imitation effect' was not limited to unionised workers. One MAWU organiser recalls Actonville workers from a non-unionised printing factory coming into the office and saying they were on strike because of other strikes in the area.

The mood in the Boksburg / Benoni area was especially tense and exciting for workers at this time. As a factor it should not be underestimated. The psychological burden of oppression is an immense one and the feeling of being 'on the march' was an enervating force for workers. The tension was not reduced when unknown arsonists destroyed the Benoni offices of FOSATU in July.

In a statement issued at the time, FOSATU pointed to the 'strange' coincidence that the fire occurred at a time of increased militancy on the East Rand. 'It also seems strange that the office that was most badly damaged was that used by MAWU, whose members have been involved in massive strike action in recent weeks, with almost 4000 workers at Salcast and Hendler and Hendler having struck for higher wages'.⁽¹⁵⁾ The subsequent continuation of the strike wave shows that the fire had no intimidatory effect.

A further significant factor in the spread of the strikes was the hostels. There was, according to many sources, a general feeling in the Vosloorus hostels that it was time for an increase. In Tembisa and other hostels the mood was similar. For union organisation the hostels are complex institutions. They are overcrowded, uncomfortable and sometimes tightly controlled places where liquor and the frustrations of a single-sex existence take their toll. But at the same time they bring large numbers of workers together in a single place and encourage a common awareness of life in the factories, in the cities and in the rural areas. One union organiser explained how 'strikes would get discussed in the hostels over supper' and how whenever union members met in the hostels other hostel-dwellers were interested to know what

was happening. Hostels can be difficult to organise, but once organised they can (and did) become pillars of the unions' strength.

The Role of the Unions

There were some who saw in the strike wave the work of agitators and subversives. Clearly, for these people, the unions were to blame. This view was not restricted to management and the authorities. One TUCSA trade unionist said of MAWU; "wherever they go they cause trouble". Certainly it is true that almost all the strikes, although perhaps only the known ones, occurred in factories where the trade unions had been active. But it is both a narrow view of industrial relations and an inaccurate understanding of what happened, that sees the East Rand strikes in terms of conspiracy theories. The conditions under which workers live and work, and the wages they earn are such that they do not need agitators to encourage them to take action. Doubtless some of the strikes were planned, but not by the unions as opposed to the workers. In most cases, workers took action and then contacted the unions. If anything the unions encouraged negotiation and a return to work.

The East Rand unions, by their very nature, brought workers from different factories in the same industry into contact with one another. This allowed issues such as the metal IC agreement to be opposed by similar demands in different factories. It brought into contact workers from Hendler & Hendler, Salcast and SCAW Metals etc. who could then compare their different situations.

Important too, given that the strike wave covered an entire region, were the meetings which different shop stewards councils held. This FOSATU structure (and mostly FOSATU unions were involved in the strikes) brought together shop stewards from different industries. This allowed for unified action such as the spreading of the demand for R2 per hour. It also made solidarity action possible. The Colgate boycott was launched and popularised at shop stewards' council meetings on the East Rand. Workers in many factories started wearing boycott stickers on their overalls. The threatened success of the boycott was undoubtedly a factor which caused management to back down and recognise the union. Another solidarity action, which was ultimately thwarted, followed the TMSA strike in Springs. After the dismissal of all the strikers and the refusal of management to talk, the Springs shop

stewards council met and decided that all shop stewards should pressurise their own managements to take back the TMSA workers. This happened at a number of Springs factories (notably Kelloggs and Braitex), although without success. At the meeting it was also decided to call a general meeting for all Springs workers that Sunday. Possible solidarity action was on the agenda, but the meeting could not take place because it was banned. Thus the existence of unions was important for the structures they provided which enabled workers to keep in contact with one another.

Most of the strikes on the East Rand broke out spontaneously, or were initiated at the shop floor level. The unions encouraged workers who came out to act in a disciplined and united manner. This strategy generally paid off. The unions discouraged protracted stoppages and encouraged workers to resume production once management had agreed to negotiate (as, for example, at Hendler & Hendler). At Colgate, the 2 day strike was aimed at stopping management delays in finalising a recognition agreement which they had already conceded in principle. Overall, the strikes were of short duration. Excluding those that were unresolved, the longest (e.g. Plant Protection, SCAW, Dorbyl, TMSA) lasted only 4 to 10 days and were all unsuccessful, with the exception of SCAW Metals. Not all the shorter stoppages led to victories, but the tendency was for them to have a far greater success rate.(16)

The unions generally played a cautious and disciplining role. Particularly important were structures, such as the shop stewards councils, which provided important arenas for workers from different factories to meet.

State Involvement

Direct involvement by the state was a notable feature at a number of strikes. In this Boksburg was different. A legal case following assaults during the Rely Precision strike in 1980 may result in a number of Boksburg policemen being required to pay large sums in damages. This possibility seems to have exercised a cautioning influence on police in the Boksburg area, with the result that industrial conflict is usually left to management and the workers to sort out. This was not the case at Triomf Fertilisers where 500 workers struck in August at the Chloorkop plant, near Kempton Park. They were demanding pay increases of 35% and their stoppage came at a crucial time for farmers. Management insisted on negotiating through the liaison committee but workers wanted them to talk to their union, the CUSA

affiliated S.A. Chemical Workers Union (SACWU). During the strike, white schoolboys were used as scabs to maintain deliveries. According to the union, armed police and management arrived at the Tembisa hostels where the workers stayed and forced them onto the lorries to return them to the plant. Some were re-employed whilst others were paid off and evicted from the hostels in a manner reminiscent of the Johannesburg municipal workers' strike. Company officials denied that this had occurred.

At Telephone Manufacturers of S.A. (TMSA), the largest factory in Springs, the state played a major role in defeating the strike. On Thursday 1st October, 3 workers in the moulding department (No. 26) were dismissed, allegedly for playing cards. Workers felt this was deliberate provocation and pointed out that the workers had already knocked off. The shop steward who took up the matter was told to return the following day. When workers returned the next day they found they had been locked out and they were immediately supported by workers from dept. 27. Both departments were summarily dismissed at which point all other departments walked out singing. Riot police arrived. One worker representative claimed that he had asked to talk to management but was instead taken into an office by the riot police and allegedly assaulted.⁽¹⁷⁾ A total of 1600 to 1700 stopped work, that is, over 80% of the African workers. Almost all of the 1000 'Coloured' workers remained at their posts.

That evening a meeting in Kwa-Thema resolved not to return to work but to send representatives to negotiate with management. Management said they were only prepared to talk to 2 unions - the white-run Electrical & Allied Workers Union and the TUCSA affiliated Radio, Television, Electronic & Allied Workers Union. They also refused to reinstate either the three originally dismissed workers or the whole of department 26. Regular attempts at negotiation during the course of the following week, saw management refusing to talk.

A week after the beginning of the strike, some workers started returning. This created a lot of animosity and the townships became tense and, at times, violent. A number of workers were arrested by the Security Police on assault charges. One participant expressed the view that "the idea of an injury to one is an injury to all was gaining ground". Amongst TMSA workers the call was growing for a general strike in the Springs region. A general workers' meeting to discuss this was prevented by a ban on meetings in Springs during the weekend of 10-11th October. In addition, a leading

FOSATU official and Springs worker, Chris Dlamini was prohibited from attending gatherings over that weekend.

The state action finally broke the back of the TMSA strike. Over the next few weeks strikers drifted back to work although not all were re-employed either because they were blacklisted or because management had decided "to stabilise the African workforce at 1250 for business reasons".(18)

The fact that major changes in the production process were impending at TMSA - changes which will ultimately involve the slashing of the workforce from 3000 to 250 - may have been responsible for management's hardline attitude towards the strikers. They may have felt that this attitude would allow workers 'to dismiss themselves' (in S.A. reduced number and management terminology) and thus enable management to re-employ a reduced number and exclude leadership elements in the process. A defeated workforce would be less likely to resist forthcoming retrenchments. This view could connect with the opinion of one unionist that the strike was 'provoked'.

The striking workers wanted management to talk with MAWU. TMSA were only interested in the TUCSA, RTVEWU. MAWU claims that some of their members were also members of the RTVEWU since they had been given forms in the factory to sign up. They were about to petition to end their membership at the time the strike occurred. Clearly management made use of the fact that there was another union, in order to avoid talking to the majority union MAWU. My attempts to interview Mr. Scheepers of the RTVEWU met with little success. All he would say was that 3 workers were dismissed for 'gambling' and that the "Black and Allied Workers Union (sic!) started the trouble there. Wherever they go, the Black & Allied Workers Union (sic) cause trouble". The TMSA strike was defeated for a number of reasons including: firstly, the crucial intervention of the riot police and the prevention of union meetings; secondly, a totally inflexible management, possibly wanting to smash organisation prior to the introduction of more capital-intensive technology, and thirdly, and most importantly, the fact that the TMSA plant was not sufficiently well organised to sustain such a major confrontation with management. The workers had only recently been transferred from the FOSATU Workers Project to MAWU. Only a few Coloured workers, in a factory where they formed an unusually large proportion, participated in the strike. The fact that 1300 workers remained at their posts, weakened the workers from the outset. Another factor, which may have contributed to the defeat, was insufficient follow-up attempts to get international support from the

mother-plant.

The TMSA strike was not, however, a total setback for the Springs area as some had feared it would be. TMSA workers are still interested in organisation and total union membership in Springs at the beginning of 1982 stood at around 8000.

Conclusion

This article has looked at some aspects of the East Rand strike wave of July-November 1982. Many other areas remain to be explored such as the details relating to managements' responses, or the role which SEIFSA played. The creative role of the shop stewards councils also deserves to be examined in more depth.

Hopefully this article provides some basis for an assessment of the strikes which have been occurring lately on the East Rand, particularly in the Germiston area. These strikes, in contrast to those addressed by this article, have been largely over wages. For all the differences, however, what the current strike wave indicates (and there have been at least 20 strikes), is that last year's strike wave was no isolated occurrence and that worker organisation in the area has 'taken off' into a period of rapid growth.



Striking East Rand workers making their demands felt

This article is based largely on interviews and discussions with shop stewards, union officials, workers and management, as well as discussions with a number of people who are knowledgeable about the East Rand.

- 1 See Appendix for details of known strikes
- 2 See Work in Progress No. 17 p26-8. 'Inflation and the Working Class',
- 3 Administration Board figures
- 4 It is estimated that 60% of East Rand contract workers come from Lebowa and South Ndebele. The remainder come from a variety of areas including the northern parts of KwaZulu. The more remote the 'home' area, the more likely is it that the worker will occupy the least attractive jobs. Contract workers are concentrated in certain industries / jobs such as foundries, municipalities, and construction, where the work is dangerous, exceptionally heavy, and generally the most poorly paid.
- 5 A. Sitas, 'The Drought in the City - Hostels & Metal workers on the East Rand', p.3 (paper presented at University of Witwatersrand, History Workshop, Feb 1981)
- 6 Webster, E & Sitas, A - 'Stoppages in the East Rand Metal Industry' p.4
- 7 Webster, E & Sitas, A - 'Stoppages.....' p.2
- 8 See Government Gazette No. 7562, 1 May 1981, R879 & R880
- 9 See WIP No. 17, already cited 10 See SALB Vol. 6 No. 8 for earlier details
- 11 At Boksburg Foundry workers struck in August for the reinstatement of a dismissed shop-steward. In October they struck for a full 2 days to remove the same shop-steward whom they believed had been 'bought'. Both strikes were successful
- 12 Webster, E & Sitas, A - 'Stoppages....' p.2-3
- 13 Webster, E & Sitas, A - 'Stoppages....' p.2
- 14 The threat which these developments pose to worker organisation may depend on developments in white politics. The real basis of the split between the 'verligtes' and 'verkramptes', between Botha and Treurnicht revolves partly around questions such as changes in labour policy. Beneath the appeals to 'volk' lies a basic division over whether the National Party should remain, as it used to be, based on an alliance of white farmers, workers, professionals, the petty bourgeoisie and the Afrikaner capitalists (the Treurnicht / HNP / Mulder view) or whether it should transform itself into the more unambiguous representative of monopoly capitalist interests (Botha/Malan/Wassenaar). The importance of the extreme right-wing will lie in whether they appeal to a white working-class constituency in areas like the East Rand or whether they rely on outmoded appeals to 'volk'. 15 FOSATU Worker News, August 1981
- 16 Hyman has distinguished between lengthy strikes ('trials of strength') and 'demonstration stoppages' whose chief purpose is 'to call attention to the workers' feelings of grievance' and in which strikers are usually willing to return to work to allow for negotiations '...even before concrete concessions have been offered'. There is also the very short stoppage where workers wish to draw immediate attention to a grievance, whilst they remain on the premises. A number of these extremely short and successful stoppages occurred at factories such as Harvey Tiles and Vaal Metals during the strike wave.
- 17 Sowetan, 12-10-81 18 Star, 17-10-81

PENDIX -- known East Rand Strikes, July -- Nov. 1981

Factory	Demand/Cause	Duration	No's	Management Response/Outcome
<u>July</u>				
Stag Packaging (Springs)	Dismissals & dispute over NUTW and manag. compulsory overtime agreement	-	90	Lock-out. Workers oppose re-employment
TMSA (Springs)	1 dept. wanted production reduced	-	100	Production reduced
Salcast / AMF (Benoni)	Wage increase	2 days	2000	Refused but att. bonus and small increase granted
Colgate Pal-molive (Bksbg)	Union recognition	2 days	250	CWIU recognised
Hendler & Hendler (Bksbg)	Wage increase	3 days	2000	Refused but att. bonus granted
Bisonboard (Boksburg)	Wage increase & reinstatement after all dismissed	2 days	400	No increase but PWAWU negotiate reinstatement
Langeburg (Boksburg)	Wage increase	1 day	1200	Increase granted
EMI (Steeldale)	Reinstatement of dismissed	4 days	60	All fired
Plant Protection (Bkpn)	Wage increase & reinstatement of 2 workers	1 day	100	Reinstated, but no increase
Vaal Metals (Bksbg)	Removal of S/S chairman believed 'bought' by management	1 hour	200	S/S dismissed. Management stalling on negotiations with MAWU
Hendred-Freuhauf (Wville)	Reinstatement of bl.worker dismissed after fight with white foreman	2 days	400	Bl.worker reinstated
ERPM (Bksbg)	Withdrawal of new death benefit scheme demanded	2 days	4000	Scheme withdrawn
<u>August</u>				
Friomf Fertiliser (Chkop)	Pay increase	-	500	All fired. Evicted from hostels by police

Factory	Demand/Cause	Duration	No's	Management Response/Outcome
Auto-Industrial (Isando)	Wage increase	3 days	300	No increase. 120 dismissed including most MAWU S/S
Gundle Plastic (Bdfvdm)	Reinstatement of dismissed workers	3 days	250	Refused. Alternative labour immediately employed
Mine Steel Products (Bksbg)	Reinstatement of workers who refused to carry extra-heavy load	2-4 hrs	132	Reinstated
Anso Metals (Alberton)	Wage increase	2 days	220	All dismissed
Plant Protection (Bkpn)	Series of 3 strike-wage increases and recognition of CWIU	10 days	100	Workers dismissed. Selective re-employment
NDC Bksbg)	Recognition of SFAWU	1½ days	500	17 not re-employed. Recognition negots. delayed
L & F Metter (Bksburg)	Reinstatement of dismissed worker	1½ days	220	Worker reinstated (?)
Bksbg Foundry	Reinstatement of dismissed shop-steward	1 hour	170	Reinstated
Reef Chemicals (Bksburg)	Dismissal of manager demanded	2 hours	150	Manager not dismissed
Reef Chemicals (Bksburg)	Continuation of above dispute	1 hour	150	Manager not dismissed
Reliable Products (Alrode)	Dismissals	2 days	170	Reinstatement
<u>September</u>				
Reef Produce (Bksburg)	Reinstatement of dismissed S/S	1 day	40	No reinstatement but talks with SFAWU
Pick & Pay (Bksburg)	Reinstatement of dismissed worker	2 hours	100	Worker reinstated
Johnson Tiles (Ofsftn)	Recognition of BCAWU	-	300	Strikers dismissed. Selective re-employment
Nat. Spring Mnf. (Wadeville)	Reinstatement of 2 and recognition of S/S and not Liaison Com.	1 day	-	-
SCAW Metals (Wadeville)	Reinstatement of bl. worker who fought with w. foreman	4 days	2000	Worker reinstated
Power Steel (Wadeville)	Reinstatement of dismissed worker	1½ days	400	Refused

Dorbyl (Bksbg)	Wage increase	4 days	464	Returned pending negotiations which resulted in increase refused
Dorbyl (Bksbg)	Angry at refused increase	3-4 hrs	464	Increase still refused
H. Lewis & Co. (Boksburg)	Reinstatement of dismissed union comm. member	2 days	560	No reinstatement. All fired
TM Foundries (Wadeville)	Removal of foreman	2 days	300	Foreman removed
Mine Steel (Boksburg)	Reinstatement of dismissed workers after refusal to negotiate	1½ days	132	Workers reinstated. Negotiations with MAWU
S.A. Breweries (Isando)	-	-	-	-
<u>October</u>				
Boksburg Foundry /SPE	Removal of S/S believed 'bought' by management	2 days	170	Shop Steward removed
Stamcor /SPE (Boksburg)	Wage increase		70	Refused to negotiate but some increases
L & F Metter (Boksburg)	Reinstatement of colleagues	2 hours	150	Reinstated
TMSA (Springs)	Reinstatement of 3 dismissed workers	1 week	1700	Refused. All fired and re-employment
Johnson Tiles (Ofsftn)	Reinstatement of dismissed union reps.	-	300	Most strikers dismissed
Viljoens Transport (Wadeville)	Dismissals after protesting non-payment 12 years leave pay	2 days	70	All fired then dismissed
Siemens (Isando)	Reinstatement of dismissed S/S	4 hours	450	Reinstated
SCAW Metals (Wadeville)	Refused to join closed-shop union	½ day	280	Jobs retained without joining closed-shop union
TM Foundries (Wadeville)	Wage increase	3 hours	350	Reduced increase granted
Nickel Chrome (Boksburg)	Removal of worker who told manag. he was forced to join union	1 hour	120	Worker dismissed
TM Foundries (Wadeville)	Removal of personnel officer	½ day	350	Personnel Officer removed

Factory	Demand/Cause	Duration	No's	Management Response/Outcome
<u>November</u>				
Airtec Davidson (Ednval)	Dismissal	2 hours	250	No reinstatement
Salcast (Benoni)	Dismissal of w. supervisor	less than 1 day	444	Foreman warned by management. 188 workers resign
Piggot, Maskew and Co. (Wtfld)	Wages	1 day	450	Management agrees to open negotiations
Piggot, Maskew and Co. (Wtfld)	Wages	1 day	450	Co. withdraws recogn. of CWIU. All dismissed but many re-employed Worker reinstated
Hall, Langmore and Co. (Wville)	Reinstatement of worker dismissed after quarrel with foreman	2 days	600	
Allenwest GE (Benoni)	Changes in wage structure Increases	1 day	150	Demands refused
Automated Plating (Isando)	Reinstatement of dismissed colleagues	-	120	All 6 reinstated

Note: The above appendix may include errors and does exclude stoppages about which no details could be obtained. However, every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of the details printed.

Growth of a New Worker Organ -

The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council

Jeremy Baskin

"People work all the time now. We are like preachers, only it is the Church of Union now". (shop-stewards' council member).

A crowd of about 500 workers make up the audience at the D.H. Williams Hall in Katlehong. It is mid-April. Outside, the weather is bitterly cold and many do not come. The crowd is waiting patiently. One of the organisers is late, because he is discussing problems with striking workers at the nearby union offices. The meeting begins with singing. Then come the introductions, first from those on the stage, organisers, union officials and office-bearers of the shop-stewards' council. Then shop-stewards, sitting all around the hall stand up to shouts of 'Amandla', and introduce themselves one by one.

Every three months the Germiston Local of FOSATU holds a general meeting for all members in the area. The mood is positive and militant, in this one of the fastest growing areas for FOSATU. The chairman opens the meeting with a brief speech. The struggle has come a long way, he says. But we should remember that we are not fighting only for a 20 cents wage increase, but for our rights and for our country. Workers in the audience shout their approval.

Then the organisers' reports begin. Moses Mayekiso of Metal and Allied Workers Union reports that MAWU membership in the area is now about 10 000. Factory after factory gets reported. In Henred-Fruehauf the workers won a 35 cents per hour increase. At Litemaster, dismissed shop-stewards were eventually reinstated and a director there was fired. Numerous examples of wage demands and unfair dismissals follow. The details of various strikes are given. Since the beginning of the year over 30 factories have struck for wage increases. Most have been unsuccessful, with the employers refusing to negotiate wages except at the Industrial Council level. We must plan for SEIFSA, we must build up so that we can control the employers, Mayekiso tells the audience. We mustn't rely on the Industrial Councils or on SEIFSA.

Worker anger on pensions is also expressed. Money gets deducted without consultation with the workers. You can't get your pension until you're 65, even if you're out of work. If you die, you can't be sure your wife will get it. She will be sent back and forth to the homelands looking for it until she gets tired. Dissatisfaction with pensions is clearly very high, as the audience show by their shouts.

Then Ephraim Tshabalala rises to report on the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). The union is active in 11 factories in Wadeville and has 2 900 members. One story he tells makes the audience angry. At Liquid Air (Wadeville), the largely female workforce work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with no tea-time and only 30 minutes lunch. Workers were told that if they don't love the company they can leave it. But, in the space of a week the whole workforce joined the union, and they are still battling to be recognised by management.

The Glass and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), with a local membership of about 800, gives its report. At one factory the workers struck after the dismissal of two or three of their colleagues. Management told the union that they had always dismissed people in the past, without it leading to a strike. Our answer, says the speaker, was that the workers have joined the union now, and that the old times have gone.

A Carlton Paper shop-steward gives the report on the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU). He reports only on a recent strike following dismissals at Nampak. The union organises in three factories and has about 600 members.

The time for comments and questions from the audience has come. But first there are summaries and speeches from the platform. The chairman

warns workers that they mustn't sit back and relax after they have signed a recognition agreement. They must still attend meetings and organise so that everything can grow. The employers meet every day. If we don't come together then we'll achieve nothing with the employer. Many of you have worked for 30 years, he says, but you've still got nothing in your hands.

The problems of strikes are the main concern; not surprising when one realises how many strikes have hit the area, especially during the last eleven months. The speeches are all different. Most are militant, but some are cautious, some cover the issue generally whilst others are very specific. But overall the message from the different speakers is very much the same. The strike is our only weapon to make the Boers understand our problems. We are fighting for our rights and we need strong organisation and we need to move in the right direction. Another speaker warns that unplanned strikes lead to defeats. From this comment, many suggestions follow about the strategies that workers should use during strikes. Discipline is stressed. Shop-stewards must be able to control their people and not work in the blind way they sometimes do.

The need to consolidate the local is pointed out. Many feel that if a problem, such as unfair dismissal comes up, then shop-stewards should first take the matter to the foreman and then to top-line management. If there is still no solution, then the organiser should be called in.

The rest of the day is spent talking about FOSATU policies, an education lecture is given and there is information on the Henkel boycott in support of striking workers in Durban. After the main reports people start drifting out, but the majority stay on.

The Area

The Germiston Local in FOSATU covers mainly factories in Wadeville (Germiston) but also includes workers from the nearby Alrode (Alberton) industrial area. The area is known for its concentration of metal and engineering factories, which is why MAWU predominates in the local. The workers mostly live in the nearby townships of Natalspruit, Katlehong and Vosloorus. FOSATU has its offices conveniently located on the edge of Katlehong. Known as Morena Stores, it consists of one large empty room at the back of a garage and shop.

FOSATU is new to the area as a properly organised force. One or two

other unions are active in the area but not to a very large extent. General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), hard-hit by recent detentions, has a small presence. There are also CUSA-affiliated unions which appear to have been losing membership to FOSATU affiliates over the past year. In the area, particularly Wadeville, FOSATU is easily the major union grouping.

The shop-stewards' council was formed in April 1981 at a time when there were only 3 unionised factories in the area and of these only one (Henred-Fruehauf) could claim to be properly organised. The aim, according to one of the organisers, was simply "to organise the other factories". The intention was to give shop-stewards an organising role not only in their own factory but in other factories as well. Three office-bearers (all working locally) were elected at the time - Mr. Richard Ntuli as chairman of the council, Mr. Johnson Nonjeke, vice-chairman, and Mr. British Sigxabayi, secretary. New elections held on the 21st April 1982 resulted in Mr. R. Mofokeng being elected chairman, Mr. Nonjeke being re-elected as vice-chairman, Mr. B. Moloi as secretary and Ms. M. Mokwena, assistant secretary. The three original office-bearers all came from MAWU factories. Since the new elections only two come from MAWU, whilst the other two work at glass factories.

The council is open to all shop-stewards of FOSATU affiliates in the area. Four affiliates are active at present - MAWU, GAWU, CWIU and PWAU. The procedures of the council are not always strictly adhered to, but in general there is a planning meeting with the shop-stewards' council itself coming together every alternate week.

The planning meeting is open to the chairpersons of the shop-steward committees at different factories. It discusses how organising is going and the points to be put to the full shop-stewards' council. "At the planning meeting we just collect what's happening", one participant told me. All points have to be ratified and decided on by the full council, not by the planning meeting. The planning meeting is allowed to make emergency decisions, but these too have to be ratified later.

The shop-stewards' council meets every second Wednesday after work (about 5,30 p.m.). There is no set method for sending representatives. Any factory where there are members, can be represented. In practice, well organised factories send a whole group, whilst others send perhaps one or two representatives. In addition, not all organised factories participate in the council. The committee say that usual attendance at council meetings is

'good' with between 80 and 90 shop-stewards present. A council meeting I attended in mid-April had only 35 workers present, whilst another in early May attracted about 100 shop-stewards.

One organiser explained the purpose of the council: "The shop-stewards' council is not to solve individual factory problems like dismissal.... At the council we discuss disputes like strikes. Let's say there's a strike in a certain factory, how can we help those workers?....Also it discusses about organising the local to be tight.....Educating the local....the stewards and all that".

The main aim of the council, and the reason why it was formed, was to involve the shop-stewards in organisational work. The problem was, and still is, that one of the fastest growing union areas in the country still has only one full-time organiser, a MAWU employee. At least two other unions send organisers on a regular basis, but they also have responsibilities in other areas. The practical problems, of having only one organiser, are therefore enormous. "The organiser can't go to all the factories", it was explained. "So we sat down and thought; let's change our strategy and give the job, the onus to the shop-stewards. So they are doing the organising".

Factories have been allocated to different shop-stewards who now 'handle' them. They are also in the office on Saturdays and in the afternoons 'just like organisers'.

Every three months the council holds a general meeting for all FOSATU members in the area. But this doesn't always materialise because of other FOSATU meetings scheduled for the same date. For example, the meeting of the Germiston local described at the beginning of this article was almost cancelled because it clashed with a FOSATU regional executive meeting. Some organisers were keen to cancel the general meeting, but the shop-stewards' council was insistent that it should go ahead.

An emergency / special meeting of the council is held from time to time. The organiser, together with the secretary and the chairman of the council can convene a special meeting if this is felt to be important. This was done following the strike at Litemaster (which will be looked at later), and also earlier this year during the wave of strikes in the area. On that occasion, explained one of the organisers, "there were discussions about how to keep those people solid, united and stewards were visiting those factories on strike.... Encouraging them, explaining to them how to keep themselves united and how to push management. I think that's why we won in factories

like McKechnie and T.M.F."

Advantages and Difficulties

Presently, the shop-stewards' council is characterised by its militancy, mutual support of one group of workers for another and strong grassroots organisation.

All of this is made possible by strong local organisation. Workers in the area share many problems. They use the same buses and trains, they live in the same areas and they know other workers in neighbouring factories. The common conditions which workers face at a local level becomes a major spur to militancy, once organisation gets started.

The shop-stewards' council ensures that problems and demands are shared by all the organised workers. This is of course what any union (industrial or general) tries to do. However, a strong local structure means that demands spread more rapidly and in a more grass-roots manner. Many of the strikes this year have revolved around wage demands. Workers' demands in one factory will be noticed by workers in a neighbouring factory, who have similar grievances. Most wage strikes this year concerned demands not simply for increases against inflation, but for a 'new wage'. This demand 'caught fire' in the area and spread rapidly, particularly in Wadeville. The fact that workers began presenting common demands generally strengthened their position in the area.

Only a few of the wage strikes were successful, the most notable victories being at T.M.F. and McKechnie Brothers. In most cases the employers refused to negotiate wages outside of the Industrial Council, a strategy in keeping with SEIFSA guidelines. "But even in factories where we didn't acquire material success", comments one organiser, "the important gain is that the workers learned that they have to struggle hard against the power of the employers to get what they want. And the employers learned that the workers are no longer prepared to sit back whilst the employers are making decisions for them".

This working class offensive in the Germiston area is reflected in the structure of the shop-stewards' council. It encourages unity between workers across union lines. Although workers' problems may differ from factory to factory, and from industry to industry, in most respects (and especially at a

local level) they face the same problems. One executive member of the council explained that FOSATU's policy was for industrial unions. "But to put the workers together in the locals", he continued, "we must have a FOSATU local like the shop-stewards' councils to bring the workers together, to make common decisions and to control what's happening in that certain area". Workers are encouraged to see beyond their own union to the struggles of the workers as a whole.

The council has taken up a number of struggles and made them into battles for the Germiston workers as a whole. For example, it decided to act on the dismissal of 22 workers at Litemaster late last year. It was decided to support them financially and R2000 was collected from Germiston workers to help the 22 for the three months they were out. In the factory itself, the remaining workers instituted a ban on overtime. Then it was decided to take management to court on the grounds that they had committed an 'unfair labour practice'. Workers were also expected to pressurise their own managements to get Litemaster to re-employ those dismissed. The issue was seen as an important one for the area. Litemaster was regarded as a union stronghold and defeat would have been a setback for the workers. For this reason the council decided that if all else failed (i.e. the overtime ban, the legal action and pressure on other managements), then they "...have to support them by all stopping... an hour or $\frac{1}{2}$ hour whatever" The decisions over Litemaster were the result of an emergency meeting of the shop-stewards' council. In the end, a brief general strike was not needed because management backed down and re-employed the 22. Perhaps it was the threat of strikes in the area, the risk of losing the court case or possibly the pressure on management from their German head-office, which led to the back down.

More recently the shop-stewards' council has been considering taking a similar stand over dismissals at Flekser. After a long strike management were able to divide the workers and re-employ all but 34. But the idea of mass action on the Flekser issue has been postponed whilst the case is handled by lawyers for submission to the Industrial Council and the new Industrial Court.

The issue of retrenchments is a burning one in Germiston area. On the 21st April the shop-stewards' council met and stewards from 72 factories announced their determination to fight retrenchments. Employers were accused of enforcing overtime while retrenching workers. The council called for

retrenchments to be negotiated with shop-stewards and union officials. "Workers are the only ones to suffer when the economy runs into trouble" said one organiser. The council wanted employers to lay off workers for 2 or 3 months rather than retrenching them. Other action demanded by the council was that workers should consider refusing overtime work and ask for a shortening of working hours / days.

The council also united in opposition to the Industrial Council system and SEIFSA. No wage increases were granted in late-April, although these are usually granted at this time of year. This was a result of the deadlock in Industrial Council negotiations, and SEIFSA's refusal to negotiate wages outside this body. Opposition to the system has been frequently expressed, most recently during wage strikes at Haggie Rand (Jupiter) and SCAW Metals (Wadeville). SCAW is regarded by workers as the 'pillar' of SEIFSA.

In recent months, management has frequently followed a policy of dismissing all strikers and then attempting to re-employ selectively. The shop-stewards' council decided to take up this issue following the dismissal of 380 workers at National Spring.

The dispute had arisen after management unfairly, in the workers' opinion, dismissed one of their colleagues. All 380 workers then downed tools in protest. Management then dismissed them all. The council decided to adopt a three-pronged strategy. Firstly, it would try to persuade township workers not to 'scab' by taking up the vacant jobs. Secondly, it would get shop-stewards to approach their own managements to ask them to persuade National Spring to rehire totally, and not selectively as planned. Thirdly, it would approach the motor unions and ask them not to handle the company's products. This last tactic is a potentially very powerful form of boycott. It is not yet a well developed tactic in this country and is only known to have been tried once previously, during the Firestone strike in the Eastern Cape in 1981.

The council is therefore a body which allows workers to share their demands and to increase their power through common action and decisions. It has enabled the working-class in the Germiston area to make major forward strides and achieve victories not only in one factory, but in the area as a whole. Unfortunately, South African trade union history, from the I.C.U. to the present, is full of examples of extremely militant, fast growing worker organisation which has subsequently collapsed. Usually this has occurred as a result of repressive state action as well as internal problems in the unions

concerned.

The Germiston local shop-stewards' council needs to consolidate itself if it is to survive. This is clearly perceived by the organisers and the council leadership. The dilemma is how to expand and grow whilst consolidating at the same time. In trying to resolve this dilemma the council has a number of advantages on which it can draw, as well as problems which it needs to face. Some of these problems are of a general organisational nature which most unions experience, whilst others are specific to the council.

One of the biggest advantages of the council is that it forces the shop-stewards to be active. A shop-steward at Henred-Fruehauf, for example, cannot only worry about problems in his factory. He must also concern himself with the problems of the area as a whole. The most important way in which this occurs is by making the shop-stewards' council responsible for organising. It is a widespread practice in trade unionism that workers will join after being approached by workers who are already members. People talk at lunch break or on the train home.

But the council expects more from at least some of its members. Once workers have joined they still require proper organisation. "We're trying to make a move", explained one council executive member, "that shop-stewards should not rely on organisers. They should group themselves and go out and organise difficult factories". This active participation in organising increases the experience and strength of the local. The fact that it emerged because of the shortage of organisers means that very real problems still remain. A part-time organiser cannot do everything done by a full-time organiser. But much of the load is taken off the full-time organisers.

The shop-stewards who assist with organising still have to work and so cannot immediately deal with such things as strikes which break out during the day, a frequent occurrence in Wadeville. Newly organised factories also tend to rely too much on the union officials.

Shortage of full-time organisers has combined with enormous membership growth in the area, especially in the last 12 months. This has led to major problems such as workers having 'joined' but waiting up to two months to be properly signed-up and get dues receipted. Negotiations at certain factories (such as T.M.F.) have also fallen behind.(1)

"We're still expanding, too fast. We can't cope", one official admits. What has happened frequently is that a relatively small percentage of workers in a factory will join the union. Then there will be a strike, other

strikes having been seen all around, and the workers will come to the union to join up and ask for help. The problem becomes how to capture the spontaneous militancy of the workers, but at the same time build solid organisation.

Mayekiso admits to delays in organising and dealing with problems. "The workers, if they join, want everything done now", he explains, "whether they are organised or not. Well, we believe that you can't just join the workers today and then tomorrow you approach management and you solve their problems. You have to organise them and to train them and to give them a spirit of unity. Then you approach management about recognition and solving their problems. Because if you approach management before they become united, then they'll be victimised and you won't be able to solve their problems. They don't accept that fully. When they join the union they've got burning issues".

An advantage of the council is that it puts power into the hands of shop-floor leaders. The representatives on the council are directly elected by the workers in their factory. Therefore, there is direct representation on the body that decides most of the important issues in the area. In theory it is the executive committees of the various unions that set policy and determine action. In practice, in Germiston, it is the shop-steward council that is the power at the local level. This was felt to be "not a problem" by the council executive. All the local executive committees of the various unions support the council. Often a decision is taken at the shop-stewards' council and the executive committees must go along with it.

The lack of structure in the council is felt by some to be a problem. In particular there are no rules for ensuring that whenever decisions are taken, those present represent the majority of the area's organised workers. There is fairly strict policy concerning what the planning meeting can discuss and ensuring that the full council has the final say. But on the question of representatives there is no clear policy. Shop-stewards from any factory may attend, whether that factory has majority union membership or not. In practice some organised factories will neglect to come whilst unorganised factories may be represented.

The council executive doesn't feel that it is necessary to make the structure more formal, and it doesn't see the need for a constitution. This would overlap with existing decision-making bodies, the regional executives and branch executives of the union. "It's alright if we write down our

objectives", said one member, "but it shouldn't be called a constitution". There appears to be an unwillingness to change the present system because although the meetings may lack structure, they are also informal and not bureaucratic.(2)

The council is planning to discuss the adoption of objectives. "We talk of unity", it was explained. "What kind of unity and how far should we go as a local? What sort of help, what sort of things we should do, and the disciplinary procedures. Because if we are to be united we have to have disciplinary procedures and some clear objectives.... As workers, then we are involved in political issues, so we have to be clear on how to react to such things.... Problems like rent have come up.... We have to do some things outside the factory".

A problem which does emerge from time to time is that another FOSATU meeting is scheduled for the same time as a meeting of the council or a general meeting of the local. (This was the case at the general meeting described at the beginning of this article). The result was that the chairman of the council and a number of others went to the Regional Executive Committee meeting. This unfortunately gives a bad impression to the people, one shop-steward said, when the matter was being discussed.

A number of problems emerge from the meetings of the council itself. Participation in discussions is often very small with the result that a handful of strong shop-stewards do a lot of talking. Participation is not always low however and some issues will lead to widespread discussion and contributions from large numbers of those present at the council meeting.

Possibly related to this is the fact that some organised factories do not attend meetings of the council. Representatives from SCAW Metals have difficulty in coming sometimes because they work on the three shift system. Consol Glass faces similar problems and other factories may be affected by this.

Some factories don't yet see the need to have shop-stewards attend the council. One problem here is that because the area is MAWU dominated, non-MAWU shop-stewards have felt that discussions excluded them. This is a problem that smaller unions often face. But if one of the aims of the council is to promote inter-union solidarity, then it is a problem which needs to be overcome. Of the 11 most active factories on the council, only one (Plate Glass) is not in MAWU.

Conclusion

Despite the problems and difficulties which face unions and the shop-stewards' council, the developments in Germiston area are positive. The shop-stewards' council has emerged as a body capable of directly expressing the demands of the workers. It has been a practical, and yet very creative, response to the upsurge of militancy and organisation in the area. Only time will tell how the council develops. Much will depend on whether it can continue to respond to the mass militancy in the area and, at the same time, consolidate and give disciplined organisation to the workers.

One member discussed the problems the council faces. "We are faced with the problem of building solidarity amongst us. When we face a problem then they (the workers) must know it's a struggle, not an insurance that I just come then I am helped. It's a long struggle. Then, to give them that understanding - that they are a certain class that they have to fight.... So that they know when they fight in factories, whom they fight and they distinguish themselves".

May 1982.

Thanks to the workers, shop stewards and officials in Germiston (especially Mos) for their co-operation and assistance. The responsibility for errors of fact or interpretation is of course mine.

- 1 Negotiating recognition agreements is a time-consuming business. MAWU has already signed agreements with 3 companies - Dresser S.A. and two branches of Henred-Fruehauf. Final recognition is close to hand at three other companies - SCAW Metals, Reliable Products and Litemaster. About half a dozen companies are still busy negotiating with MAWU. All in all, about 15 MAWU factories are 'well-organised' with shop-stewards being recognised and taking up issues with management.
- 2 The nearby FOSATU shop-stewards' council in Springs, formed on the 15th August 1981, has been discussing the adoption of rules and objectives. Its proposed aims include 'building solidarity' and 'counteracting sectional union interests among workers and their representatives'; organising workers into FOSATU; assisting workers and unions by 'solidarity actions, publicity and financial support'; and making 'links with community organisations to encourage solidarity between the community and the workers' struggle'.

In Springs the aim is for the council to meet only 'once a year', and for its work to be carried out by sub-committees; a managing committee, an organising committee, a financial committee and a publicity committee. The aim seems to be to combine the council and the Branch Executive Committees in the area. It is proposed that the managing committee consist of the office-bearers of the three committees as well as the office-bearers and secretary of each FOSATU affiliate operating within the local.

Search for a Workable Relationship

Food and Canning Workers Union

In this article, first published in the Cape Town community newspaper, Grassroots, the Food and Canning Workers Union opens the debate on the working relationship between community organisations and trade unions.

The townships and locations in the Cape Peninsula face big rent increase. In what way should a trade union involve itself in the fight for decent housing and lower rents? The government is trying to force an apartheid body, the Indian Council, on the so-called Indian people. What stand should a trade union take in the broader struggle for democracy in South Africa?

Questions such as these have been discussed in our Union and have raised further questions.

How does the struggle of workers for higher wages and a say over their lives in the factories fit in with the struggles community organisations are fighting? What is the difference between trade unions and community organisations? When and in what way does a trade union co-operate with such organisations?

Separate Organisations

There are no simple answers to these questions. Among trade unions there are different approaches. Some unions close their eyes to anything that happens outside the factories. Other unions involve themselves in each and every issue in the community. In the same way, there are different

approaches among community organisations to these questions.

Some suggestions are therefore put forward here, from the viewpoint of the Food and Canning Workers Union and the African Food and Canning Workers Union to try to create a better understanding of these matters.

Our viewpoint is that a union should not split the struggle of workers in the factory from struggles outside the workplace, on community and political issues. We do not believe that the problems of the workers in the factories are separate from the problems in the areas where they live. Nor can we ever say that it is no concern of workers that they have no say in the government of the country.

However, we do believe that separate forms of organisation are needed for these struggles. A trade union is not a community or political organisation. A union which tries to be a community or political organisation at the same time cannot survive. It can also not afford to neglect the problems and organisation of the workers for wider issues. This means that the problems and organisation of workers must be foremost. And whatever community or political issues are taken up, must be fully discussed with the workers first.

But such discussions with workers at different factories take time. The Food and Canning Workers Union and the African Food and Canning Workers Union have never disregarded community or political issues.

It is not only for political reasons that we draw a line between the trade unions and community organisations. What is important is that the members of a trade union are workers, and that a union should be led by workers.

A trade union brings together workers who are divided in so many different ways, because they are an oppressed class and share a common oppressor. The trade union achieves unity by offering workers a specific form of organisation.

In our union, this form of organisation begins in the factory. Organisation then develops along industrial lines. For the strength of the union in one factory is greatly increased if workers in an entire industry are organised. At each factory the workers elect a committee to deal with factory problems.

At a branch level, workers are elected who control the affairs of the union. This gives the workers strength and a knowledge that it is their organisation. In turn, they will organise other workers into our union or

other unions.

Community organisations on the other hand, are open to workers and non-workers. In most cases the leadership in these organisations are intellectuals or people with more education.

At this point, community organisations do not have a strong base of worker members. The workers who do participate do not always feel that they have a major part to play in such organisation.

This is bound to happen in an organisation open to worker and non-workers. Especially, where workers lack organisational experience.

Workers are workers because they are deprived. They are conditioned to accept that they can only do the least skilled work. In the factory they are forced to accept the authority of the supervisors, foremen and managers. These people have more education, and are less deprived than the workers. And, when workers meet this same class of people outside the factory, they are bound to leave decisions to them.

The apathy of "Coloured" workers in the Cape Peninsula is, in our experience, a major stumbling block to organisation. One reason is that the working class is dominated and made to feel inadequate in almost every way - whether it be at school, church or at home. This difficulty does not exist in the rural areas of the Western Cape, where a larger proportion of these communities are ordinary workers.

There are people who do not want to recognise that there are class divisions among the oppressed. For us there can be no lasting alliance between workers organisations and community organisations unless this division is understood.

With this in mind, let us look at the way in which trade unions can ally with community organisations. If this alliance involves union officials and community spokespersons only, it can serve little purpose.

If unions call for the support of the community, to stop scabs from taking the jobs of striking workers, or to boycott a company's products, what matters is the extent of community organisations' support. This support seems to be weak amongst the working class.

Similarly if community organisations call on the support of trade unions, the sympathy of trade union officials is of no help. If people are fighting for lower rents or busfares, that call must reach the organised workers. An alliance between trade unions and the community must involve the ordinary membership for the strength of an organisation does not rest on its leaders alone, but on the enthusiasm and initiative of its members.

Problems to be Overcome

Unfortunately community organisations and workers outside the trade unions often approach unions in a way which diminishes the role of the members, and increases the problems we have to overcome.

1. Leaders are sought out and treated as celebrities. Now the leader in a workers' organisation is only a spokesperson. Leadership is more easily corrupted in a workers organisation. More so, when such persons are treated in this way. It does not follow that because a person is a leader in a union that he or she should be a leader in a community organisation. Each organisation and each struggle should generate its own leadership.
2. Certain unions are sought out as being progressive unions. We must admit that a large part of the trade union movement has actually become an obstacle to the progress of the workers, particularly in the Peninsula.

A certain amount of debate is a good thing. But, it must be borne in mind that the workers and not the community must judge the unions in the end. Further, once certain unions are singled out, there is the potential for friction between unions. At a time when trade unions must unite we cannot afford this. Unrealistic expectations are also placed on unions whether they can fulfil them or not.

3. Unions are often invited to attend meetings or support campaigns, at notice which does not give union officials time to consult the membership. Unions take time to reach decisions. If they are not given enough time then it is the officials alone who can be involved. This also creates a separation between officials and the membership.
4. A trade union should not be asked to take part in a community organisation as such. We have more than enough to do organising workers than to want a finger in every pie.

Rather the members of our union who can belong to a community organisation, should be referred to that organisation. We would hope our members would be in the forefront of community struggles - not because they are union members, but because they know the value of organisation.

Where there are no organisations in a community, the trade union can encourage its members to establish one. So too, we would like community organisations to refer workers to trade unions.

5. The involvement of trade unions should not be sought if they are not to be involved, or informed, in full of the programme. It can happen that unions are invited to attend a meeting, which it turns out, implicates us in

activities which the authorities regard as illegal, about which we were not consulted. The police may raid our offices, but the members know nothing about it.

6. Trade unions must be allowed to determine their own priorities. The organisation of the workers and the unification of the trade union movement are of the first importance.

Towards Lasting Links

There ought to be a greater understanding of the enormous demands that are made on unions. There should be no moral or political pressure on trade unions to become involved in community issues with which they are not able and ready to cope.

These are only some of the issues that come in mind, if the trade unions and community organisations are to establish more solid and lasting links. We hope that this article will be criticised, by trade unions, community organisations or anyone else; and that this may assist in strengthening both community and trade union organisations.

Mass Strikes on the Mines

Jeremy Baskin

Anger over low pay increases sparked off strikes and unrest involving approximately 70,000 miners during the first week of July. The anger was primarily directed at the mining houses of Gold Fields of South Africa (GfSA) and General Mining Union Corporation (Gencor). By the end of the week, at least ten miners lay dead and many others were injured. In addition, hundreds of workers were arrested and thousands were dismissed and deported back to their home areas.

The mines known to have been affected were Grootvlei, Stilfontein and Buffelsfontein gold mines and two Impala Platinum mines (Bafokeng North and Wildebeestfontein South) - all owned by Gencor; West Driefontein, Kloof, East Driefontein and Venterspost gold mines - owned by GfSA; as well as three coal mines collectively known as Durban Navigation Collieries (Durnacoll) - owned by ISCOR. Workers at a number of other mines were affected (e.g. Deelkraal) although no actual unrest has been confirmed.

The number of workers involved in either strikes or unrest appears to be in the region of 70,000, far higher than the official Chamber of Mines figures. This may even be a conservative estimate, since most black workers

at the affected mines (which employ approximately 102,000 blacks) participated in one way or another. As such, the pay strikes of July 1982 produced the largest scale labour action to hit the mining industry since 1946, and the most costly in miners' lives since the Carletonville shootings of 1973.

The Question of Pay

Previously, mine unrest has prompted management and the police to point to tribal animosity and agitators as the source of the trouble. The latest unrest was no exception. However, it is clear that the July unrest/strikes were not tribal in origin, but a response to low pay increases. Gencor and GFSA were the hardest hit because their increases were the lowest.

For some years, the Chamber of Mines (CoM) has announced wage increases for black workers at the beginning of July. The workers have come to expect increases at this time, and the preceding weeks are filled with anticipation and speculation. On the wage issue their demands were twofold. Firstly, black workers wanted increases to compensate for inflation - to keep their wages at the same real level. Secondly, they wanted a new higher level of earnings - their present wages still being a pittance.

The increase announced at the beginning of July was disappointing in both respects. By awarding an increase of about 12%, the Chamber was effectively telling black mineworkers to accept a drop in their real incomes. The increases brought the minimum rate of underground workers to R129 per month and for surface workers to R100 per month.

The details of the latest increase are as follows:

- Minimum starting wages for surface workers have been increased by 11,1%.
- Underground workers (the overwhelming majority will see their wages go up by 12,2%.
- These increases apply to workers at gold, coal and platinum mines.

The percentage increase offered is the lowest in many years. Last July, underground workers received 15% increase whilst surface workers got 20%. This year's increases are believed to be the first which have not kept pace with the inflation level, since black wages started rising in the early 70's. The inflation level is presently running at about 16%. The official C.P.I. increase for lower income groups during the past twelve months has been 14%. Both figures are higher than the announced wage increases.

Workers' anger has resulted not only from the low percentage increase, but also from the way the increase has been spread. GFSA, followed by Gencor, pay very badly to the bottom categories of workers. In these categories (there are eight categories for black miners) they are the lowest paying companies in the whole mining industry. However, in category 8 GFSA pay the highest wages and for category 6 and 7 they are above the rest. Category 6 includes the important group of 'team leaders' (i.e. the black miner in charge of a gang). Gencor follows similar policies. In the latest pay rise these two mining houses increased the differentials between the majority at the bottom and those in the top categories. This undoubtedly heightened the anger of most black miners.

At least 3 mining groups are likely to pay more than the Chamber increase. Anglo-American has announced that its minimum rates will go up by 19% (surface) and 15,4% (underground), and that all wages will rise by an average of more than 16%. According to Anglo, its new rates will be R150 for underground workers (compared to the CoM figure of R129) and R129 for surface workers (compared to R100). Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) and Rand Mines are also likely to pay above the CoM figure although they have not released details. These three groups have not been hit by any of the recent strikes. The wrath of the workers has been directed against the GFSA and Gencor groups.

There are two basic factors in explaining why the CoM increases were so low. Firstly, the economic conditions in the mining industry have been poor. Gold has been particularly hard hit with the dramatic slump in the gold price. The falling uranium price has also meant that this by-product is no longer always profitable. A point is being reached where it will be most profitable to close some of the more marginal gold mines, management argues.

However, the gold mines are still making large profits for their owners, even if the super-profits of recent years are no longer being matched. The seven gold mines of the GFSA group are an example. In the year ending June 30th 1982, the total profit from these mines (after tax and the state's share of profit) amounted to more than R602 million. From the workers' point of view, profits are still more than sufficient to allow for dramatic wage increases. During the boom period workers received only the most minimal benefits out of the super-profits then being made. Now, they are expected to pay for the less favourable economic conditions by accepting cuts in their real wages.

The second reason for the low CoM increases relates to its conflicts with the white employees who come together in the Council of Mining Unions (CMU). During wage negotiations which began earlier this year the mining union not surprisingly rejected a derisory offer by the Chamber. (It is believed that some Chamber members wanted to offer no increase at all). Further attempts at negotiating failed and talks were deadlocked when the Chamber refused to go above 9% ('the maximum the mines could afford') whilst the CMU was demanding 15%. The unions began preparing for a legal strike. The CMU and particularly Arrie Paulus' Mine Workers Union (MWU), did not want to settle until they had seen the extent of black wage increases. This was, therefore, another reason for the CoM's limited increases to black workers - they wanted to fend off the demands of the white miners. The delaying tactics of the CMU nevertheless paid off. An eleventh hour pre-strike settlement on the 6th July, saw the unions and the Chamber agreeing to a compromise increase of 12%.

One of the more significant factors in the Chamber's wage announcement has been the open split which has emerged within the ranks of the mining bosses. The Chamber has tried to maintain a united front on the question of wages. Whilst divisions have been emerging behind the scenes, until this year no mining house seriously broke ranks. All paid essentially the same minimum wages, differing mainly in the specific category wages and in the area of production and other bonuses. The announcement by Anglo-American that its minimum rates will be higher, may herald the beginning of a reduction of control by the Chamber over conditions of service and wages. The mining houses divide between the so-called 'liberals' (such as Anglo and Rand Mines) and the outright reactionaries (such as GFSa), with the rest (JCI, Anglovaal and Gencor etc.) falling somewhere in between.

Their different attitudes relate directly to profitability. Quite simply, Anglo can afford to make more concessions than some of its less well-off competitors. Anglo mines are generally richer and it is the dominant company in almost all sectors of the mining industry. In practice this means that Anglo mine workers are generally better accommodated, paid and fed than those working for, say, GFSa. This does not mean that Anglo conditions are good. However differences count. The strikes by GFSa and Gencor workers may have related to the fact that Anglo workers (often at neighbouring mines) received slightly higher increases. Previously, all mine workers had been on the same starting wage scale.

Industrial Relations

Establishing the exact details of what had been happening in the mining industry is a difficult task. Mine management is notoriously defensive about labour conditions (not altogether surprisingly) and will often give out half-truths or downright lies to the media. For example, a rockburst in April at Western Deep Levels resulted in five (or possibly six) deaths. Press reports only mentioned two dead. Incomplete press reporting? Management lies? Since media access to striking mineworkers is almost impossible, the press tend to end up reproducing management and police versions of the events. The few published interviews with mineworkers have revealed a totally different perception of their problems and grievances compared to the views expressed by management. (See for example RDM 5 Sept. 1979).

Industrial relations on the mines mirror these management attitudes. They are (with small variations between mining houses) paternalistic, racist, tribalist and repressive. The recent comments of the PRO of GfSA, Mr. Moller, although later retracted, only serve to highlight this. He described rioting miners as "savages dancing around a fire". Behind this racism lies a deep-seated management fear of workers as a confidential internal memorandum of the GfSA group reveals. After much hesitation, the memorandum reveals, the group decided to introduce ethnically-based liaison committees in late 1975. But even these useless bodies were an adventurous step for them. Although 'in the final event' they were to be 'the main means of management contact with employees', they were 'not intended to supersede the excellent relationship that our Compound Managers have with employees'. 'We have had few problems in our communications with our employees', concludes General Manager PWJ van Renburg, 'and we do not wish to upset this state of affairs by introducing "advanced methods" to which they are not yet attuned, provided we keep abreast of events'.

In 'keeping abreast of events' since then, new ways of channeling grievances have been introduced on most mines. These have often been in conjunction with high-powered industrial relations advisers. And yet, almost without exception, these bodies have not voiced major worker grievances nor have they given management forewarning of impending unrest. For all the 'sophisticated' developments the strategy remains the same to keep workers powerless and divided, to keep labour cheap, and to use extreme force when the workers get out of hand. To a greater or lesser extent, this holds for all

mining groups.

The net effect of this strategy has been to turn legitimate worker strikes into illegitimate, violent riots. With no channels to express their rejection of the wage offer, and without the right to refuse to go underground, the workers are left with few options. Some of the comments in the press concerning the recent unrest are illuminating. One report stated quite blandly that at West Driefontein, No. 5 hostel refused to go to work "and police had to use teargas" (Star 3/7/82). In the Sowetan of 6th July the same Mr. Moller quoted earlier is reported as saying that nearly all the Kloof mine's workers were involved in unrest and that workers had run around yelling 'mali, mali' (money, money). The report continues by quoting him as blaming 'intimidators' for preventing workers from going on shift.

Other reports also reveal that police (SAP or mine police) appear to form a substantial part of management's industrial relations arsenal. At West Driefontein workers gathered at the compound gate on the evening of July 1st. They wanted to see the compound manager. They were militant (not surprisingly since they'd just heard about their low increases) but they were not violent. Nevertheless, the response was to call in the mine security. The crowd was dispersed with teargas. Then the helmeted, green overalled security men, carrying transparent shields moved with dogs through the compound. It was simply "a show of force", one manager unofficially admitted. Overhead flew a helicopter equipped with a siren. After this response the worker violence began as windows were smashed and a new concession store was totally destroyed.

At Kloof mine dismissed workers were taken from the hostel and made to board buses or trains home under heavy police escort. These methods of responding to worker grievances would appear to be so much the rule that an exception became the subject of a front page article in the Star (7/7/82). Headlined 'Unarmed officer is hero of mine showdown', the report relates that one Col. Heunis, the District Commandant of Krugersdorp, had earned praise for "fearlessly facing 1800 black mineworkers alone" at Ventepost Gold Mine. Col Heunis had arrived on a mission, together with a force of fifty men, to arrest about 80 mineworkers who were alleged intimidators. Keeping his force out of sight, Col. Heunis then told the workers to elect a committee and that he and the mine officials would go into their grievances "and try to satisfy you". The workers then agreed to elect a committee. Col. Heunis was praised for his "raw courage". Whether 'intimidators' were then arrested was not

made clear.

The very structure of the compounds is built in expectation of unrest. Most compounds have only one tightly-controlled entrance. The newer ones are often built so that sections can be sealed off if necessary. Well-equipped riot-control rooms are common features. Western Deep Levels mine is not unique in having numbers painted on the various roofs within the hostel. This is to facilitate security action from the air. At Venterspost, the single entrance to the compound is topped by a military-style tower with searchlights and camera equipment. Access to the tower is possible only from the outside which is used for controlling unrest.

The whole structure of industrial relations on the mines leads to violence. The fact that at least ten mineworkers lost their lives in the unrest, whilst many others were injured, is one of the inevitable outcomes.

General Conditions

Although the strikes/unrest were a result of low pay increases, there were other contributing factors. The whole position of black miners affects their every action and demand. They live in an environment whose oppressiveness is total. Unlike a worker who leaves the factory for home at 5 pm, the miner has no such freedom.

Working underground must surely be one of the most unpleasant jobs possible - and one of the lowest paid! Imagine descending daily down a shaft and walking kilometers along steadily narrowing passages until you climb or slide into the small cavity where you will work for the day alongside, perhaps, 8 other men. Above you lies up to 3 kilometers of rock, continually threatening to close down upon the metre-high cavity you have opened and in which you are working. You work for 8 hours. The darkness is illuminated only by the battery-powered light attached to your helmet. The work is unhealthy, heavy and dangerous - loss of life and limb is frequent. Every day brings the fear that the worker will not ascend alive. But mostly the work is tiring, and the sweat pours in temperatures and humidity levels that make Durban in February feel like an Arctic winter. Then there is the long trek back to the surface and the inevitable delays in getting a lift up - the white miners are invariably hoisted up first. On a good day the black miner can expect to be back for a shower and a meal ten hours after he went underground.

Not that 'home' is an appealing prospect! The compounds are huge, single-sex complexes. Some of the newer hostels are more spacious and have 16 men per room (Hostel No.9 - W. Deep Levels) but it is not uncommon to find 20 men crowded into tiny rooms (the case at strike-hit Venterspost). Rooms and sometimes whole sections of the compound are divided ethnically. One miner explained to me that in the old days the division was into broad Nguni and Sotho groups. Recently the division has become stricter as Pedi speakers are separated from Zulu and Sotho speakers etc. In brief, the miners live in the hostels without their families, and without privacy. Sport is encouraged as an outlet to frustration.

The unrest on the mines and the forms it took cannot, therefore, be divorced from the total working and living environment of black miners.

Conclusion

The pay strikes of July '82 were enormous in their magnitude. Clearly, the miners need a strong union to articulate their demands and discipline and coordinate their actions. But in an industry where 'trouble-makers' are blacklisted by the labour recruiting offices (those fired are unlikely to find a job in mining again), the establishment of a genuine union would be a daunting task. The recently formed Black Mine Workers Union (BMWU), groomed by the TUCSA-affiliated Boilermakers Society and with a constitution rumoured to have been written by the Chamber of Mines, clearly does not fit the bill.

8 July 1982.

DOCUMENTS

The Workers' Struggle -

Where Does FOSATU Stand ?

The following document is the full text of the keynote address, given by the FOSATU General Secretary, Joe Forster, at the FOSATU Congress in April this year.

Introduction

Three years ago - almost to the day - we met in this very same place to form FOSATU. Today we have set as our theme - the Workers Struggle - in a serious attempt to further clarify where we as worker representatives see FOSATU to stand in this great struggle.

That we are discussing this theme today and resolutions that relate to it is a justification of our original decision to form FOSATU and shows how seriously we take the new challenges that face us three years after that decision. Clearly any such discussion raises many very important issues and the purpose of this paper is to try and bring together these issues in ways that will help guide our discussions.

It is the task of this Congress to give a clear policy direction to our actions between now and the next Congress - we believe that the issues raised in this paper are crucial to a political understanding of our policies and what we hope to achieve by them. We also believe that it is the task of Congress to add and modify the views expressed through open and serious debate.

FOSATU – an Assessment

In the three years that FOSATU has existed there is little doubt that we have achieved a lot in terms of growth and gains made for our members. However, I believe that our greatest achievement is the fact that at this Congress we are determined to re-evaluate our policies. We are determined to respond to new challenges and set new directions if this is necessary. We could have made this Congress a great occasion open to all to parade our successes and hide our failures, however, we have chosen otherwise.

We have chosen to keep it closed and to once again self-critically examine our position. I believe that this shows our determination to take the great militancy of our members and use this to build a just and fair society controlled by workers.

We have no intention of becoming self-satisfied trade unionists incapable of giving political direction to the workers struggle.

Yet we would only be dreaming of change if we do not strengthen and build our unions into large and effective organisations.

At our Inaugural Congress we stressed certain policies and set ourselves the task of establishing a tight federation of non-racial, national, industrial unions, based on shop floor strength. We set ourselves the task of sharing resources between affiliates and of building up an educational programme. We further stressed our independence in regard to party political organisations and from international trade union organisations.

Now it is not my task to assess every success and failure of FOSATU. There are reports tabled that will allow delegates to draw their own conclusions. However, it is important to make certain assessments in order to go further and identify why we need to clarify our position and set and new clearer directions.

I believe that we have to ask ourselves two crucial questions:

- have we established an effective organisation based on shop floor strength and national non-racial industrial unions?
- has our organisational activity developed worker leadership that can give guidance and direction to all workers?

In answer to both questions it would be wrong to expect a positive answer after only three years. However, we should be able to assess if we are going in the right direction.

Clearly in regard to the first question we made progress – it could even

be said to be considerable progress - with NAAWU, NUTW, and MAWU beginning to be a significant presence in what are major industries. However, there is a long way to go both in these cases and more so in those of the other affiliates.

It is, however, the second question that poses more problems. As the unions grow and are faced with new challenges it becomes crucial that the leadership knows what direction it is going in. What are the organisational strategies that are necessary as the unions become larger and more effective? What dangers to worker militancy lie in recognition and stability?

As these unions grow then the question is what role do they play in the wider political arena. There has been a great upsurge in political activity over the last few years and many different political groups are looking to the union movement to state its position. We must be sure our organisation and our leadership can confidently state its position and continue to organise in the way that will strengthen and not weaken that position.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the issues we should debate if we are to meet the challenges.

Working Class Movement

As a trade union federation we are clearly concerned with workers and their aspirations. If we were to think in terms of our members only, we would have a very limited political role. If, however, we are thinking more widely of the working class then we have to examine very much more carefully what our political role is. In particular we need to look at this role in the South African context.

If we look at the advanced industrial countries then we see what can be called working class movements. There are a number of different organisations - trade unions, co-operatives, political parties and newspapers - that all see themselves as linked to the working class and furthering its interests. These working class movements are, therefore, powerful social forces in those societies.

In the capitalist economies these working class movements have power and organisation yet politically the working class is still subject to policies and practices that are clearly against their interests as the activities of Thatcher and Reagan show. This is increasingly leading to intense political and organisational activity to give the working class and the union movement

a clearer direction so as to gather together the working class movement into a force that will more definitely put workers in control of their own destiny.

In the Socialist countries similar battles are being fought. Whilst social, political and economic relations in these countries have been greatly altered and there have been great achievements to the benefit of workers, there is still the need for workers themselves to control their own destiny. So Solidarity was not struggling to restore capitalism in Poland, its struggle was to establish more democratic worker control over their socialist society.

Now my purpose in briefly looking at the working class movement in the advanced industrial countries was twofold:

Firstly, so that we can be clear that worker activities such as strikes and protests do not in themselves mean that a working class movement or working class politics exist. These later are more than that - they are large scale organisations with a clear social and political identity as the working class.

Secondly, I wished to show that the mere size of working class organisation is itself no guarantee that workers will control their own destiny. In fact as the struggle of Solidarity shows, even the fact that a country is said to be socialist does not guarantee that workers control their own destiny.

In short it could be said that workers must build a powerful and effective movement if they are to succeed in advancing their interests against some very hostile forces, but they must also ensure that this movement is able to take a clear political direction.

The experience of the great working class movements in the advanced industrial countries is a very important guide and lesson to us. However, it cannot provide all our answers. Firstly, in South Africa we cannot talk of a working class movement as we have defined it above. Secondly, whilst there is undoubtedly a large and growing working class its power is only a potential power since as yet it has no definite social identity of itself as working class.

The questions we should, therefore, address ourselves to, are:

- Why has no working class movement emerged?
- What are the prospects for such a movement emerging?
- What role can FOSATU play in such a process?

Political History and Workers

It is not possible in a paper such as this to deal fully with all the developments in South Africa's history that have led to the non-existence of a workers' movement in South Africa.

South Africa's history has been characterised by great repression and the major political and ideological instrument for this repression has been racism. Yet the major effect of this repression has been to very rapidly establish a large capitalist economy.

Racism and the violence and injustices associated with it is a very stark and clear form of repression. Along side this only about 5 - 10% of the population has ever had the franchise. Clearly, therefore, there is a very identifiable oppressive force and the major political task of the oppressed peoples has always been to attack that oppressive and racist regime.

So what has developed in South Africa is a very powerful tradition of popular or populist politics. The role of the great political movements such as the ANC and the Congress Alliance has been to mobilise the masses against the repressive minority regime. In such a situation mass mobilisation is essential so as to challenge the legitimacy of the State both internally and internationally.

Where virtually all the population is voteless and oppressed by a racial minority then a great alliance of all classes is both necessary and a clear political strategy. Furthermore, building such an alliance was a great task.

The ANC had to overcome racial division so as to rise above the divisive racism of the oppressors. They had to deal with opportunistic tribal leadership, to organise thousands upon thousands of people and they had to do all this in the face of harsh repression by the State. In achieving this there is little wonder that the ANC rose to be one of the great liberation movements in Africa.

In this context it is also easier to see and understand why the trade union movement acted in a particular way. The racial divisions in the working class, linked as they were to other objective factors, made it possible for capital to quite quickly suppress any serious challenge to their supremacy. It was possible to create the conditions that led to a politically tame union movement and thereby forced more militant and progressive unions to bear the brunt of State action, which in turn affected the politics of these unions.

Furthermore, at all times there were occasions when workers resisted by strike action, protest and organisation. Yet this by itself cannot constitute a working class movement. Whilst the unions were often prominent they were always small and weakly organised both nationally and in the factories. They could not provide an organisational base for a working class movement as we have defined it above.

Progressive and militant unions were continually the subject of State harassment, but, never managed to seriously challenge capital nationally or on a sustained basis. As a result the effective political role of progressive unions and of worker activity was to provide a crucial part of any popular struggle and that was to give it its "Worker Voice". No mass popular movement can be effective or be seen to be effective if it does not have some worker involvement or representation. By the 1950's with the growth of South Africa's industry and the size of the working class the need to include workers became essential and as a result SACTU became an important element of the Congress Alliance.

In these circumstances the progressive trade unions became part of the popular struggle against oppression. They did not and probably could not have provided the base for working class organisation. There is of course no doubt that their activities have been very, very important in creating the conditions that led to the emergence in the last ten to fifteen years of the present progressive trade unions. However, these unions are operating in a different environment.

Workers and their struggle became very much part of the wider popular struggle. An important effect of this development was that capital could hide behind the curtains of apartheid and racism. The political energies of the oppressed masses and of international critics were focussed on the apartheid regime and its abhorrent racism. The government and Afrikaanerdom became the focus of attack. In fact the position was such that learned liberal academics saw in capital the great hope for change despite the fact that capital and its lackeys were undoubtedly the major beneficiaries of apartheid.

Capital did its very best to keep in the political background and as a result this helped prevent the creation of capital's logical political opposite which is a working class political movement. However, of crucial significance was that capital was growing rapidly and changing its very nature into a more monopolistic, technologically advanced and concentrated form. Its links

internationally were also growing as was its importance for international capital.

We find, therefore, that behind the scenes of the great battle between the apartheid regime and its popular opponents that the capitalist economy has flourished and capital emerges now as a powerful and different force. It:

- is highly concentrated in truly gigantic corporations;
- has access to international information on how to deal with working class challenges;
- has access to the State's security information;
- is able to rapidly share and assess information;
- is able to use the objective circumstances in its favour such as unemployment and influx control to weaken worker organisations;
- is now an important part of international capital and cannot, therefore, be lightly discarded by international capital;
- is able to hide behind politics and as a result can hide its sophisticated attacks on labour because no-one is paying any attention.

Yet as the upsurge of popular political activity emerged again in the 1970's some of its new forms such as Black Consciousness also place little emphasis on capital. So there is a growing gap between popular politics and the power of capital and as a result the potential power of workers. It is in this context we should look at the likelihood of a working class politics emerging.

Need for a Working Class Movement

The growing size of the economy and the dramatic changes taking place in capital have created important new conditions in the economy. We also have to take into account the speed and manner in which the economy has developed. In discussing the working class movements in the advanced industrial economies, we have to bear in mind that in most cases they took about 100 years or more to fully develop. Industry started first by building larger and larger factories and bringing people together in these factories.

The new capitalists had to struggle politically with the older ruling classes over labour, land, taxation policy, tariff protection, political rights and political power.

Then mechanisation became more important and there was a definite

change in production processes. As this happened the skilled workers who had usually given leadership to the craft unions found themselves in a very difficult position. As a result leadership problems in the organisation of trade unions and the political environment, developed in a complex and relatively slow way.

In South Africa this has been condensed into 60-70 years and from the outset large scale capitalist enterprises dominated. The birth of capitalism here was brutal and quick. The industrial proletariat was ripped from its land in the space of a few decades. At present capitalist production massively dominates all other production. There are no great land lords on their agricultural estates and there is no significant peasantry or collective agriculture. Virtually everyone depends for all or part of their income on industry or capitalist agriculture.

The working class have experienced a birth of fire in South Africa and they constitute the major objective political force opposed to the State and capital. There is no significant petty bourgeoisie or landed class with an economic base in our society.

In the economy capital and labour are the major forces yet politically the struggle is being fought elsewhere.

The existence of this industrial proletariat and the rapid transformation of capital are very powerful reasons why a working class movement could rapidly develop in South Africa. There are a number of factors that will assist in the organisation of workers:

- the great concentration of capital has also meant a greater concentration of workers. These workers generally have a higher level of basic education and skills than before and their links with the past are all but broken so that more and more a worker identity is emerging:
- this is reinforced by the sophisticated strategies that are designed to "de-racialise" industry and some other areas of society. The effect of this is to divide off certain privileged members of Black society leaving workers at the bottom of the privilege pile:
- the concentration of workers in industry has also concentrated them in the great urban townships;
- the particular structure of the South African economy with its high degree of State involvement, price controls and heavy dependance on international markets has made it a very sensitive economy. As a

consequence attempts to "buy off" the major part of the working class will fail. It is more likely that as some readjustments of privilege are attempted that it will have to be workers that suffer through inflation and lack of basic commodities;

- the above factors and South Africa's international economic importance are likely to force capital into the political open and as a consequence develop a worker response;
- although capital can at present hide behind apartheid it is also the case that if workers organise widely enough they can get great support from the international labour movement. Also international public opinion has to be very carefully watched by capital because both international and South African capital are dependent on their links with the rest of the world.

These then are some of the important factors that are favourable to the development of a working class movement in South Africa. However, this does not mean that this will automatically happen. To understand this, we need to look at the present political environment more carefully to see both the present political tendencies and to establish why some active leadership role should be played by the unions and FOSATU in particular.

Workers need their own organisation to counter the growing power of capital and to further protect their own interests in the wider society. However, it is only workers who can build this organisation and in doing this they have to be clear on what they are doing.

As the numbers and importance of workers grows then all political movements have to try and win the loyalty of workers because they are such an important part of society. However, in relation to the particular requirements of worker organisation, mass parties and popular political organisations have definite limitations which have to be clearly understood by us.

We should distinguish between the international position and internal political activity. Internationally, it is clear that the ANC is the major force with sufficient presence and stature to be a serious challenge to the South African State and to secure the international condemnation of the present regime. To carry out this struggle is a difficult task because South Africa has many friends who are anxious to ensure that they can continue to benefit from her wealth. The fact that the ANC is also widely accepted internally also strengthens its credibility internationally.

However, this international presence of the ANC which is essential to a popular challenge to the present regime places certain strategic limitations on the ANC, namely;

- to reinforce its international position it has to claim credit for all forms of internal resistance, no matter what the political nature of such resistance. There is, therefore, a tendency to encourage undirected opportunistic political activity;
- it has to locate itself between the major international interests. To the major Western powers it has to appear as anti-racism but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to be at least neutral in the super power struggle and certainly it could not appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries as the response to Solidarity illustrates. These factors must seriously affect its relationship to workers;
- accordingly, the ANC retains its tradition of the 1950's and 1960's when because there was no serious alternative political path it rose to be a great populist liberation movement. To retain its very important international position it has to retain its political position as a popular mass movement. This clearly has implications for its important military activities.

Internally we also have to carefully examine what is happening politically. As a result of the State's complete inability to effect reform and the collapse of their Bantustan policy, they are again resorting to open repression. Since 1976 in particular this has given new life to popular resistance and once again the drive for unity against a repressive State has reaffirmed the political tradition of populism in South Africa. Various political and economic interests gather together in the popular front in the tradition of the ANC and the Congress Alliance.

In the present context all political activity, provided it is anti-State, is of equal status. In the overall resistance to this regime, this is not necessarily incorrect. In fact without such unity and widespread resistance it would not be possible by means of popular mass movements to seriously challenge the legitimacy of the present regime.

However, the really essential question is how worker organisation relates to this wider political struggle. I have argued above that the objective political and economic conditions facing workers is now markedly different to that of twenty years ago.

Yet there does not seem to be clarity on this within the present union movement. There are good reasons for this lack of clarity.

As a result of repression most worker leadership is relatively inexperienced and this is made worse by the fact that their unions are weak and unstable organisationally. The union struggles fought against capital have mostly been against isolated companies so that the wider struggles against capital at an industry or national level have not been experienced. This also means that workers and their leadership have not experienced the strength of large scale worker organisation nor the amount of effort required to build and democratise such large scale organisation. Again State repression and the wider political activity reinforce previous experiences where the major function of workers was to reinforce and contribute to a popular struggle.

Politically, therefore, most unions and their leadership lack confidence as a worker leadership, they see their role as part of wider struggle but are unclear on what is required for the worker struggle. Generally, the question of building an effective worker organisation is not dealt with and political energy is spent in establishing unity across a wide front.

However, such a position is clearly a great strategic error that will weaken if not destroy worker organisation both now and in the future. All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive - most often colonial - regimes. But these movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problem of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority.

It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will end have no option but no turn against their worker supporters.

Broad and complicated matters have been covered and it is difficult to summarise them even further. However, I shall attempt to do so in order for us to try and examine the role that FOSATU can play in this struggle.

1. That worker resistance such as strike action helps build worker organisation but by itself it does not mean that there is a working class movement.

2. There has not been and is not a working class movement in South Africa.
3. The dominant political tradition in South Africa is that of the popular struggle against an oppressive, racist minority regime.
4. That this tradition is reasserting itself in the present upsurge of political activity.
5. However, the nature of economic development in South Africa has brutally and rapidly created a large industrial proletariat.
6. That the size and development of this working class is only matched by its mirror image which is the dramatic growth and transformation of industrial capital.
7. That before it is too late workers must strive to form their own powerful and effective organisation within the wider popular struggle.

FOSATU's Objective

From what has been said we believe that FOSATU must set itself the task of giving leadership and direction to the building of a working class movement. Our efforts so far have equipped us to do this. Our organisation is nationally based, located in the major industries and the militancy of our members has generally developed a politically aware and self-critical leadership.

FOSATU as a trade union federation will clearly not constitute the working class movement nor would this place FOSATU in opposition to the wider political struggle or its major liberation movement.

FOSATU's task will be to build the effective organisational base for workers to play a major political role as workers. Our task will be to create an identity, confidence and political presence for worker organisation. The conditions are favourable for this task and its necessity is absolute.

We need have no fear of critics - our task will contribute to the wider liberation struggle and will also ensure that the worker majority is able to protect and further its interests. Ours is a fundamental political task and those who ask of workers their political support without allowing them the right to build their own organisation must answer for their real motives.

As was said above, capital has transformed itself and has a greater capacity to tolerate worker organisation because it is now more powerful and better able to deal with a worker challenge. Also because of its absolutely central position it will have the full support of the State in its actions and

in the bitter struggles that are to come.

This requires a very much greater effort to establish worker organisation and requires thorough organisational work and ceaseless mobilisation of our members. The growth and transformation of capital has created the very preconditions for large scale worker organisation.

Our Concrete Tasks and Challenges

If we set the above as our general direction then we must deal with concrete tasks and challenges.

Organisation:

What is crucial in organisation is the quality of that organisation - the quality that gives it its overall political direction and capability. As is clear from the experience of the advanced industrial countries that we looked at earlier, organisational size alone is not enough, yet without size there can be no effective counter to capital.

Broadly one can distinguish three factors that affect the quality of worker organisation - the structure of organisational strength and decision making; the location of organisational strength and the political qualities of its leadership structures.

Structure:

The structure of an organisation should be such that it correctly locates worker strength and makes best use of that strength.

FOSATU's experience in this has been very important. Our organisation is built up from the factory floor. As a result, the base of the organisation is located where workers have most power and authority and that is where production takes place. This also has the effect of democratising our structures since worker representatives always participate from a position of strength and authority in the organisation. By stressing factory bargaining we involve our Shop Stewards in central activities and through this they gain experience as worker leadership. It should be said that they do battle every day.

These factory-based structures are the key to transforming pure quantity

of members into a flexible and effective quality. Capital's hostility to factory organisation forces members and Shop Stewards to struggle continuously or else to have their organisation crushed.

At the union level FOSATU has attempted to build broad industrial unions on a national basis. We, in effect, have a position of one affiliate per industry. We have chosen industrial unions because of the organisational advantages we gain in our struggle against capital. However, FOSATU's role is to link these industrial unions into a tight federation that is based on common policy and a sharing of resources. Our aim is to keep a unity of purpose among affiliates at all levels of their organisation.

Our task in the three years to come must be to consolidate and develop factory organisation, a national presence for our unions and to reassert unity of purpose among affiliates.

The structures we are developing are an essential basis for effective and democratic organisation and are the basis for greater worker participation in and control over production.

Location:

The question of location is closely related to structure. Without correct structures then the location of one's organisational strength is not as important.

We must accept that it will take many years to organise all workers and at present that should not be our aim. Our present aim must be to locate our organisation strategically. We need to look at the location of our organisational strength in relation to the industry, geographic area and the points at which we can most effectively carry out collective bargaining.

Our major affiliates should be located in the major industries. Within those industries we must become a substantial presence by carefully building our organisation in major factories, companies and areas.

Geographically we must clearly aim to be a national presence both as FOSATU and as the affiliates. Our organisation should be able to dominate major industrial areas. By doing this we create the major means whereby worker organisation can play a significant if not dominant role in the communities that surround these industrial areas.

Successful collective bargaining requires that the organisation is capable of mobilising its members behind demands. Thus far our unions have

only really been able to mobilise at the plant level. However, the experience of NAAWU which is exceptional in FOSATU has shown what can be gained by mobilising across companies. We have flexible structures and we must use them if we are to serve our members. We must be able to mobilise across factories and in local areas across industries. We must see industry bargaining or regional bargaining not as something to be feared but as the logical extension of our present structures and practices.

Worker Leadership:

Here we must be immediately clear that we are not talking about leadership in the sense that it is usually discussed - which is in terms of individuals and "great men". This view of leadership is not what is important for a worker organisation. What we are interested in is the elected representatives of workers and the officials they appoint to work within the organisation.

We are interested in how the leadership is elected or appointed; who it is answerable to and how this accountability is achieved; how experienced leadership is and how it gains this experience and how they develop means of training and educating leadership so that it remains self-critical and politically active.

The challenges facing worker leadership are undoubtedly different to other leadership groups. For worker leadership in a capitalist society, your everyday struggle is related to your job and therefore your wage and therefore your very ability to survive. The most appropriate comparison is with that of the guerrilla fighter who has to develop the strength to resist daily, the knowledge of his terrain that will give him every tactical advantage and the support of those for whom he is struggling. Probably most important because both the worker leader and the guerrilla are fighting a powerful enemy, is the development of a sense of when to advance and when to retreat.

These skills are not easily learnt and not easily replaced. So worker leadership cannot be wasted by opportunistic and overly adventurous actions.

We are also concerned with worker leadership in a wider arena than only that of the union struggle. Giving leadership to the working class requires an organisational base. Without this base, then the poverty and the

lack of education, information and time that workers are struggling against will be the very factors which will force workers to surrender leadership of the community to other stratas in society.

Our aim is to use the strength of factory-based organisation to allow workers to play an effective role in the community. Worker leadership will have:

- gained invaluable political experience from their factory struggles;
- organisation and resources behind them;
- organisational structures and location that will give them localised strength;
- the ability to speak with a clear and democratically established worker mandate.

The points made here should be our guide for action and we have a long way to go in building a larger leadership structure that has the political qualities of clarity, determination, discipline and the ability to be self-critical.

Working Class Identity:

The task of organisation outlined above and more important, the quality of that organisation will absorb most of our energies in the next three years, and is, therefore, our major priority. Yet to give leadership in the building of a working class movement we must start to build a greater identity for worker organisation.

In a very important way the building of effective trade unions does create a worker identity. However, there is the danger that the unions become preoccupied with their members and ignore workers generally. By establishing a clear political direction we can avoid this.

One answer that is often proposed is to be involved in community activities. That FOSATU should be involved in community activities is correct since our members form the major part of those communities. However, as we have argued above we must do so from an organisational base if we are truly to be an effective worker presence.

Without this base, it is more likely that we will destroy a clear worker identity since workers will be entirely swamped by the powerful tradition of popular politics that we examined earlier.

It is also the case that there has emerged into our political debate an

empty and misleading political category called 'the community'. All communities are composed of different interest groups and for a worker organisation to ally itself with every community group or action would be suicide for worker organisation. Under the surface of unity community politics is partisan and divided. FOSATU cannot possibly ally itself to all the political groups that are contesting this arena. Neither can it ally itself with particular groups. Both paths will destroy the unity of its own worker organisation.

This simple political fact is the reason for one of our founding resolutions. It has nothing to do with not wanting to be involved in politics. Our whole existence is political and we welcome that. Our concern is with the very essence of politics and that is the relation between the major classes in South Africa being capital and labour.

We need to state this more clearly and understand it ourselves more clearly. There is also no doubt that we must take our own newspaper very much more seriously as it can be a major instrument in building a worker identity.

At the level of organisation we have a sound base on which to work. Probably our main problem has been that we did not clearly state why we had chosen certain structures and what could be achieved by them.

As our political clarity and confidence grows, so we must state our position more clearly in our meetings, among our members and through our own newspaper.

Unity in the Labour Movement

Our first step must be to address ourselves to unity in the labour movement. If we are to create a working class movement then trade union unity has to be dealt with very early on in our struggle. Because we take working class politics seriously we must take trade union unity seriously.

At present there is a very great momentum to unity in the labour movement and we have to carefully consider and analyse what is happening.

The first point to understand is that all the unions involved in the talks are relatively weak in relation to their potential - some appallingly so. Many are too easily fooled by their own propaganda and the great interest shown by everyone into believing that they are now a strong force.

Furthermore, with a few exceptions (mostly in FOSATU), these unions are

not yet a national or an industrial presence. Their strengths lie in isolated factories and very few have any real geographic concentration. As a result, both the leadership of these unions and their membership have no clear conception of the organised power of capital nor for that matter of its weakness. There is no real experience of the difficulties of large scale worker organisation nor of the difficulties in building democratic worker structures. The bulk of the present leadership has no clear conception of the needs of worker struggle or of a worker dominated society. There is all too often a contradiction between the political position and organisational practice. Radical political positions are adopted but the organisational practice makes little headway into the power of capital nor is it effectively democratic. A number of factors result from this - often capital is attacked in the 'abstract' by making it all powerful and accordingly seeing an attack on the State as the only answer, or political energies are spent in widespread campaigns. Actual worker organisation and advance is left weak and based on sporadic upsurges rather than on organisational strength.

As a consequence of these factors it is not possible for people to draw any distinction between worker struggle and popular struggle let alone understand the relation between the two in South Africa. The unity talks are therefore conceived of as being within the wider popular struggle and as another area where anti-State unity can be achieved. A formal unity rather than a working unity against capital is therefore seen as the prime object.

There are broadly speaking three forms of unity to the union movement at present and we should look at each fairly carefully:

"Ad hoc unity": this is what has occurred at present where unity is issue-located and there are attempts to take a common stand. At present this unity is significant in that it creates unity out of apparent disunity. However, its significance will rapidly decline. Such ad hoc unity can only achieve anything on specific issues and it is inevitably forced to take more and more concerted and concrete actions unless it merely wants to be the source of endless press statements. Such further actions require a more permanent organisational link.

"United front unity": here the organisations remain autonomous but they set up a permanent platform of contact. Some people seem to see the solidarity committees as such as platform. However, although this provides a more definite organisational link considerable new problems are posed. Again the movement is towards more and more significant gestures of protest and the

problem now posed is how are decisions to be taken and on what mandate. Does each organisation have an equal vote or is voting by size? If decisions are on a consensus basis - then on what mandate? Should each organisation get a formal mandate on each issue and if they don't, how representative of rank and file membership is each decision? Is there not a greater than usual danger of decisions being taken by a few officials who have easy access to the meetings?

A permanent organisational link requires a process for making decisions that is democratic and equitable. Furthermore, if solidarity actions are to be successful they require organisational co-ordination - this in turn requires the power to sanction. How can this be done if participants are entirely autonomous?

A further step in this type of unity can be a "loose federation" such as TUCSA, where the unions are now all in the same federal organisation and the symbolism of unity is far greater. However, such a federal body - not being based on any clear principles - is unlikely to generate working unity as it would contend with numerous problems of jurisdiction between unions and it is unlikely that organisational rationalisation could take place without firm policies and particular structures.

In fact "United front unity", with or without a loose federation, can destroy the hope of greater unity by creating unresolved differences and no acceptable way of resolving these.

"Disciplined unity": this requires common political purpose, binding policy on affiliates and close working links based on specific organisational structures.

If such a federation is based on industrial unions then FOSATU is the closest to being an example of such "disciplined unity" - in the present circumstances.

If the federation were not based on an industrial structure but in a regional one, then it is more difficult to set out its working structures since there is no clear experience of how this would work. However, there is no doubt that some allowance would have to be made for industrial considerations and the industrial organisation of capital. In FOSATU we have argued that industrial unions in a "tight federation" allow for maximum flexibility and efficacy.

It is clear from this that unity means little unless these factors are taken into account. To talk lightly of unity is to keep it within the framework of ad hoc or united front unity. The effectiveness of such unity

would rapidly disappear. So if that is what is meant by unity we have to imply certain possible motives of its proponents:

- inexperience and lack of thought on the matter;
- political expediency whereby this unity is for specific limited ends of embarrassing certain organisations;
- a preoccupation with popular politics and a lack of commitment to the building of a working class political position.

However, if we in FOSATU are to take our objective seriously and that objective is the building of a working class movement then we have to take unity very seriously. Clearly by unity we should strive for "disciplined unity" since it is only such unity that can possibly meet our objective.

We must ourselves workout a programme for unity and on the basis of that programme we should not hesitate to attack those who are impeding the development of a working class movement.

Conclusion

The issues that have been covered in this paper are important and complicated - they are the basis for an understanding of the true nature of the workers struggle in South Africa and the political role our organisation must play in that struggle.

We believe that in FOSATU we have a firm base on which to build organisationally. Our task in the three years to come is to firmly commit ourselves to a working class political position. With this greater political understanding we must:

- consolidate our organisational structures;
- give guidance and leadership in the building of a larger working class movement in South Africa;
- seek out comrades and allies who will join us in this struggle;
- and in this way make our fundamental contribution to the liberation of the oppressed people of South Africa.

In doing this we must all be clear that we shall never be so petty as to insist on our organisation's name as the only one in the trade union movement which can carry out this task. It is what the organisation does that is important - not what it is called. Yet equally, we shall never be so politically foolish as to abandon the worker struggle.

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