
South African Labour Bulletin

volume 13 number 4/5 June/July 1988

The South African Labour Bulletin

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Published since April 1974.

Eight issues yearly. Guidelines for contributors and subscription form on back page.

The views expressed in the contributions are not necessarily those of the editorial board.

DOUBLE
EDITION

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Editorial note

Technical and administrative difficulties associated with our change of format have delayed the production of this issue of the Labour Bulletin. As a result, we have decided to make it a double edition. We would like to apologise for any inconvenience the delay may have caused our readers and contributors, and hope the improved

look of the Bulletin will help our readers to forgive us.

Coletane Markham, our researcher/writer for a year, has left us to study overseas. We wish her the best of luck. We welcome a new staff member, Maurice Smithers, who has joined us as a part-time administrator.

Karl von Holdt

Price increase

Rising costs have forced us, reluctantly, to increase the price at which Labour Bulletin is sold to workers. It will now be sold for R1.50. We hope our readers will understand, and continue to support us.

Working mothers win new rights

NUMSA's ADRIENNE BIRD describes recent advances in maternity rights for working women.

Parental rights have replaced maternity rights in many negotiating forums these days. CCAWUSA at EMI have already won the principle of parental rights and are negotiating major advances in this area. While these represent the "advanced guard", there are a number of important changes being pioneered in other forums. The one that affects the largest number of women is the recent changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act. But also significant are the victories in the metal and motor industries - which extend maternity rights to women across two large sectors of the economy.

UIF changes in maternity pay

On the 1st January 1988 changes to the UIF were quietly slipped onto the statute books. The changes represent a major advance for

women workers and are no doubt a result of the growing pressure by trade unions on employers for six months paid maternity leave for all women workers.

For many years there has been a demand from women workers that the UIF Act should be changed in two fundamental ways:

- 1. that the actual amount paid to women on maternity leave should be increased from 45% to full pay*
- 2. that the period of payment for maternity leave should be a flexible six months. The 1966 UIF Act stipulated that women could only get their UIF maternity pay 4 months before and 2 months after the birth of their babies. Since most women go on confinement only 1 month before the birth, they lost out on the first 3 month's UIF pay.*

Even Wiehann acknowledged

MATERNITY RIGHTS FOR WORKING WOMEN

We demand the right to:

- work when we are pregnant
- work in safe conditions
- time off to attend ante-natal clinics
- look after our babies for at least 6 months
- get paid while we are away
- come back to our jobs without loss of benefits
- paternity leave for working men (when their babies are born)

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the legitimacy of these demands in his 1981 report. He proposed that:

1. *the amount paid be increased to 60% of normal wages, and*
2. *that the period of payment be a flexible 6 months from the time that a woman leaves work to have her baby.*

However, at that time the government held that the situation should continue unchanged as they had not received reports of "unnecessary hardship" resulting from the system as it stood.

Now, in 1988, the government seems to have been pressurised on the second demand. Unions have been demanding that employers pay the difference between what women

can get from UIF and their full pay. Because money from UIF dried up two months after the birth the effect of this demand was that many employers were being asked to pay the full wages of women for an additional three months after the birth. Hence, no doubt, the pressure from employers for the change.

The new changes mean that now women can get money from UIF for 6 months from the date that they leave the job, provided they apply before the birth or within a year of having the baby.

The conditions a women has to meet in order to qualify for benefits remain unchanged:

** she must be receiving no more than one third of her normal wages from*

her employer

** she will only receive one week's benefit for every 6 weeks she has contributed to UIF - so she has to have paid into UIF for 3 years to qualify for the full 6 months pay*

** she must have contributed to UIF for at least 13 weeks to get any benefit at all.*

There has been no change to the amount that a women can get - it is still calculated at 45% of her normal wages. This is still a battle to be fought and won.

1988 NUMSA negotiations

This year has seen major advances for workers covered by the Motor Industrial Council. This represents one of the immediate benefits of the NUMSA merger.

Firstly, motor employers have agreed to include into the Motor Agreement the identical clause on maternity leave that was last year won for the Metal Industry. This provides for a 6 months guarantee of re-employment for women who have worked for an employer for 2 years.

Secondly, they have agreed that women can receive some pay from the Motor Industry Sick and Accident Fund during maternity. The amount is unacceptably small - one third of normal pay for one month. But for an industry which is notoriously conservative and which has hitherto refused even job guaran-

tees for women, this is an important breakthrough. It is NUMSA's intention to demand an extension to both the amount and the period of payment in the next round of negotiations. (It needs to be highlighted here that the Motor Industry Sick and Accident Fund is non-contributory, whereas the Metal Industry Sick Pay Fund, which pays 50% of the minimum rate for the grade for 6 months to women on maternity, is half-worker/half-employer financed.) NUMSA also plans to challenge all qualifying periods.

In the Metal Industry the failure of SEIFSA to improve maternity provisions has contributed to a dispute being declared by IMF unions, including NUMSA.

Combining these two changes

Women in the metal industry who have met the minimum contribution periods will now get 95% of their wages (Sick Pay Fund 50% UIF) for 6 months. Women in the motor industry who have qualified will get 78% of their wages (33% - Sick and Accident Fund, 45% UIF) for one month and for the remaining five months they will get 45% from UIF. Both groups of women have their jobs (and wage levels) guaranteed for up to six months after they leave work to have their babies.

Neither industry has yet agreed to paternity leave, although this has

been a demand of the union for two years.

However, if one looks back to 1983 when CCAWUSA won the first maternity agreement with the OK Bazaars, in a climate where no-one else had any such agreement,

we can see how far we have come. We still have a long way to go to get all women the rights that some have managed to win, and for all parents to get full parental rights - but some significant victories have been won.

Farmworkers strike

JABU MATIKO reports on one of the first strikes by members of the newly-formed National Union of Farmworkers (NUF).

"Our strike is a test ground for all the farmworkers. All the surrounding Magaliesburg farmworkers are asking us how are we coping with the strike, what is the employers' next move?" - LAZARUS MOTSWADI, farmworker.

It is at one of the recently organized nurseries - Impala Nurseries in Magaliesburg - that the National Union of Farmworkers (NUF) faced its major challenge from farm employers. One hundred Impala farmworkers were dismissed for going on a strike for better wages. The strike began on the 18th April after workers demanded the farm owner begin negotiations with the NUF.

Grievance of workers

The final outburst against the repressive situation at Impala Nurseries occurred after eight months of intensive discussion by workers about their working and living conditions. According to Johannes Motsila, a shop-steward on the farm, the farm-owners were

made aware of the workers' grievances in October 1987. All workers were promised an increase in early January 1988. No exact amount of money was, however, demanded by workers.

The conditions faced by Impala farmworkers are described by a woman worker, Lorencia Mbewe, as "degrading and reducing female workers to slaves..... Female planters are not paid the same wages as male planters. Women use their bare heads to carry heavy manured soil. After 33 years of service in the Impala Nurseries I am still paid R198 per month". A shop-steward who is living in the farm with his wife and one child said "I can't allow my wife to work at Impala. I don't think I could bear looking at her working like a slave, doing the same job with some men but paid a

lower wage. That I can't accept".

In addition to bad working conditions all workers are accommodated in the farm compounds. One room is allocated irrespective of the size of the worker's family.

This situation laid the basis for worker unity and the strike action in

elected by the 100 Impala workers demanded that the farmers begin talking to the NUF about a wage increase. According to Motswadi, a shopsteward, "This was a plain wage grievance and no exact amount was demanded." It appears the workers had accepted the false image of the farmer as a benevolent father. Wor-



"I can't allow my wife to work like a slave...."

Photo: Tsuks Mokolobate/Learn and Teach

Impala Nurseries. After workers had discussed the exploitative and oppressive conditions they are subjected to, they decided to meet with their employer. According to a shop-steward workers had begun to prioritise their wage demand after they were organized by NUF.

On April 18 three shop-stewards

workers had raised a wage grievance, but at the same time left it to the farmer to decide how much to offer. However the farmer's attitude to their wage grievance forced workers to be militant. According to the Weekly Mail, about 100 workers went on a strike after the farmer told the shopstewards to "F.....off".

Before midday he sacked the strikers and told them to leave the farm compound by the next morning.

Workers' experience on farms

Farmworkers are not covered by the country's labour laws. They find it difficult to belong to trade unions and develop methods of collective bargaining. No minimum wages are laid down, and farmworkers are not covered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund when they lose their jobs. According to workers at Impala, there is no old age pension. Farmworkers are simply evicted from the farm compounds and dumped in homelands when they are too old to work.

Mbewe describes her experience of the exploitation on the farms as follows: "My husband started working on this farm in 1952. In 1953 he started working as a builder. He is the only worker who is still alive among those who were building the compounds we are now evicted from. Before we were sacked he earned R297 per month".

Farmers' attitudes

Farmers resist unionisation of workers. Trade unions organise workers to be in a stronger position to struggle to challenge employers against the exploitative and oppressive conditions in the workplace. Farmers also oppose the extension of labour law to farms. Farmers

want to protect their profits by enjoying the advantage of not being subjected to legislation governing workers. The only law protecting workers at the workplace which does apply to farmworkers is the Workmens Compensation Act.

The strike by Impala farmworkers is a demonstration of workers' rejection of paternalism and exploitation coupled with state oppression. The struggle of Impala Nurseries workers for recognition of their shopstewards and living wages was sharpened as the farmer dismissed all workers who were on strike. Dismissals were used by Impala management to destroy the initiative and motivation beginning to develop in organised farmworkers.

As most farmworkers live in farm compounds, evictions and trespass charges strip workers of the right to shelter after dismissals. Like Sapekoe Tea estate workers, organised by FAWU, who were dismissed for basic union rights and thereafter evicted from the company premises in 1987, Impala workers were sacked immediately after the strike. On June 17, one month after the strike began, workers were evicted from the farm through a court order applied for by Impala Nurseries management. According to Moletsane, on Monday June 20 the farm management ordered that workers who had remained on the farm because of a lack of alternative accomodation, be

forced off the farm premises. Moletsane claimed that worker's belongings were put in a tractor and thrown in the street, about 1,5 km away from the living compounds.

Workers told SALB that unemployed workers from the surrounding farms were hired. In addition, white school children came in after school to work on the farm for R10 per day. The hiring of scab labour has not shaken the unity of workers.

Co-ordination of the strike.

Motswadi says that 20 workers defied the strike decision taken by the majority of workers. "We understand their problem. Most are very old, and the only way of living is to continue working for Impala Nurseries. Dismissals also mean losing farm accomodation", said one striker.

Before the evictions workers were holding meetings in the compound. The compound has in fact strengthened worker organisation during the strike as all strikers attend all meetings. As in many conflicts between employers and workers, Impala workers also allege the police visited them twice. On the first occasion it is alleged the police requested workers to sign some documents which they referred to as "job contracts with Impala Nurseries, but workers refused to do so the NUF organizer had told us nothing about such forms".

Launch of NUF

The Impala strike took place two months after the launch of NUF.

According to the NUF organiser, about 1200 workers travelled from Natal, the Western Cape, Northern Natal and the outskirts of Johannesburg to attend the launch.

National office bearers elected at the launching congress of NUF were Lazarus Musekwa as president, Moses Mahlangu as treasurer and Tshaka Moletsane as general secretary of the union.

The NUF organiser claims the union had membership in the Tsitstikama Forest, at Sentrachem farms in Natal, Fun Fair Chickens, pig farms in Worcester and Anglo-American Corporation farms.

NUF resolutions

At the launching congress the union adopted a number of resolutions. The political policy resolution declares that the union "accepts and recognises all the historical documents noting the liberation struggle. The union however believes that worker interests, demands and views can best be served only through the development by workers of a Workers Manifesto". NUF argues that its membership is drawn from different ideological persuasions ranging from Inkatha, to United Democratic Front and Azapo, and therefore it commits it-

self to work towards developing and enlarging from time to time the Workers' Manifesto through the regular assembly of worker representatives.

As an affiliate of NACTU, the NUF declared its commitment to the principles opposing racism, capitalism, and imperialism.

At the launching congress NUF requested that NACTU seriously reaffirm its non-aligned and non-sectarian position and work for the unity in struggle of all political movements. NACTU office bearers,

workers and officials were also requested not to use the federation as a political tool to enhance their own political beliefs.

In conclusion the union stressed that contact with and support for the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC), should continue to ensure that regional solidarity is built amongst workers. NACTU was requested to continue its dialogue with the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), and seek affiliation with OATUU.

South African co-ops form collective

South African Labour Bulletin, Volume 13 No.2, reported on a Southern African Regional Co-op meeting held in Botswana. As a follow-up, a number of South African co-ops met recently in Johannesburg. ROBERT BEROLD reports.

South African worker-controlled co-ops held their first national meeting in Johannesburg in April this year.

The two-day meeting was called to establish an editorial board for the magazine *Workteam*, published in Botswana and aimed at co-ops in the whole Southern African region. It soon became clear that the co-ops wanted more than the magazine, and that regular national meetings were needed to share ideas and common problems. An informal collective co-op was therefore formed.

Present at the meeting were bulk buying (consumer) co-ops, credit unions and production co-ops, as well as service organisations working in education and development, and the COSATU-affiliated National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee

(NUWCC).

The first day of the meeting was spent informing each other of our activities and answering questions. This is a brief summary:

* NUWCC is doing research on co-ops, to be formed under NUWCC and COSATU structures. Some buying co-ops have been established in the Cape and Natal, but no production co-ops as yet. NUWCC's principles on co-ops were clearly described by their representative:

"We must reject reformist ideas on co-ops; we must stand firmly on the idea of socialism; we must establish social ownership of co-ops; our co-ops should work closely with working class organisations."

* The Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), attended the meeting to learn about co-ops because, they said, "the best way of achieving our political goals is to have community-based organisation." So far NOW's political focus has been training its members in skills like sewing and candlemaking. The intention is to take these activities further into production co-ops.

* The Cape Credit Union League is a well-established organisation with 47 affiliated credit unions, mostly in the Western Cape but also on the mines. Their representative explained that a credit union is a kind of co-op where members put their money together. Loans are made to members only, and each credit union has a lending committee which decides on loans. In this way poor people, who cannot normally get a bank loan, can help each other financially.

Each credit union has a minimum of 15 members, and the largest has over 1000 members. The members all have savings books and receive interest on their savings. The League is affiliated to WACU, the world body of credit unions.

* Masibambane Co-op Forum in Cape Town, an advice and resource organisation for 24 self-help groups, publishes a newsletter, runs skills training workshops, and help co-ops to find markets and finance. Their representative told us:

"The Forum's main aim is to strengthen already established groups. We meet on common issues like funding. The groups apply, and the finance committee, which includes representatives from these groups, decides."

Production Co-ops

Production co-ops attending the meeting found they had many problems in common, for example the difficulty of maintaining socialist structures and decent wages in an economy where capitalists have many advantages in forcing down prices and in mass production.

Those representing production co-ops were the Sarmcol Workers Co-op (SAWCO) from Howick, Natal; ITSIDU, a resource organisation assisting a number of Northern Transvaal co-ops; and Co-op Development and Marketing (CDM), a resource group and marketing organisation linked to four co-ops in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape.

* SAWCO was formed in 1985 when the Sarmcol factory in Howick dismissed 950 workers. The co-op has 80 people working in T-shirt printing, agriculture, bulk buying, health, and community theatre. The co-op has strong links with trade unions, particularly the National Union of Metalworkers of S.A. (NUMSA). There is an emphasis on

unity, and on creating structures so that members have control over policy-making.

* ITSIDU works predominantly with four craft producer co-ops in the Gazankulu area, assisting with administration, product development, design and marketing. Its work is not confined to co-ops, however, but includes community technical assistance in water supply and building, and also literacy training. A new area of work is assisting 100 women hawkers to form a vendors association.

Marketing of crafts is done through a regional marketing association, which is affiliated to a national association. Most of the sales are done through craft markets.

* CDM is linked to and controlled by a group of four handicraft co-ops in Grahamstown. It provides on-the-job training in administration, finances and product design. CDM's marketing division buys goods from the producers and sells them to shops throughout South Africa and overseas. Fifty full-time and part-time people are working in the co-ops.

Service organisations

Also at the meeting were three service organisations providing support and training for co-ops; SACHED, EDA and SALDRU.

* SACHED (South African Council for Higher Education) were represented by members of LACOM (Labour and Community Project), Khanya College and SACHED's Distribution Unit. LACOM in Durban has run training workshops for SAWCO and written some booklets on co-ops. Khanya College students are involved in projects related to co-ops.

* EDA (Environmental and Development Agency) works in rural areas, training in practical skills. It has a commitment to democratic structures and group work, including co-ops. Their representative said:

"We do not expect to reach an end point - we work from where we and people are, building people's experience of democracy all the time, their power over issues at the local level... we see that the basic needs and community organisation approach has not done much to strengthen people's position economically - this is one reason why we are interested in learning about co-ops."

* SALDRU (Southern African Labour Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town) is a community research organisation. They have been helping a consumer co-op in Atlantis, 50km north of Cape Town, where prices are double the Cape Town prices. Goods are bought wholesale and

sold at Cape Town prices, so that the co-op still makes a surplus. The co-op is well-organised with fortnightly deliveries to members throughout the community. New members attend training workshops so that they learn how everything works. SALDRU also assists a producer co-op in Mossel Bay.

Big and difficult issues

A number of issues were raised as each group described its work. It was felt that these were big and difficult issues and that full discussion of them would have to wait until another meeting.

These issues were:

1. Self-interest versus collective interest. The pressures on co-ops often cause them to become isolated from their communities.
2. Ownership and control.
3. Funding - where and where not desirable.
4. Broader mobilisation versus grassroots action.
5. Competition, pricing and markets.
6. Choice of products for community needs as opposed to luxury needs.
7. Can co-ops be available for mobilisation if they are not economically viable.
8. Links between co-ops and broader structures.
9. Training needs versus the time lost for production.

Workteam Magazine

The second day of the meeting was spent finding ways for South African co-ops to participate in *Workteam*, which reaches co-ops in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Angola and Lesotho.

Workteam is published four times a year, with each edition based on a theme such as co-op evaluation, co-op finances, and marketing. The theme of the next issue (No. 6) is unemployment and co-ops.

It was agreed that the organisations at the meeting would distribute the magazine, and regional representatives were elected for this purpose. The SACHED Distribution Unit representative made some helpful suggestions about how this could be done.

There was some discussion about the translation of *Workteam* into African languages. It was felt that because the co-op movement in South Africa was still small, there wouldn't be a big enough demand to print translated editions of the magazine. NUWCC agreed however, to investigate the printing costs with the help of COSATU. In the meantime the meeting decided to apply for funds so that photocopied translations could be circulated to co-ops and co-op support organisations. As a further experiment some of the articles from *Workteam* would be translated into Xhosa and recorded onto cas-

sette tapes for distribution.

The meeting elected representatives whose job would be to collect and edit articles from South Africa for each *Workteam* based on the theme of that issue.

Co-op federation?

The meeting also discussed the feasibility of forming a Co-op Federation for South Africa. It was decided, especially since the meeting was not fully representative, to form an informal organisation to be known as the *Workteam Collective*. This collective would be open to all co-ops and co-op support groups, and would not have the right to direct the actions of participant organisations, nor would it put itself forward as representing anyone. It was agreed that the *Workteam Collective* should meet three or four times a year to share ideas and experiences, and that funds should be sought to cover the cost of these meetings.

All in all, a useful meeting

There was some concern that most of the participants in the meet-

ing were from co-op service and resource groups, and not co-op members themselves. It was agreed that co-op members should be in the majority in the collective, and to make sure this happens there should be two co-op members for every one service organisation member at future meetings. Researchers could attend on invitation. (Among those invited to this meeting but unable to attend were Zakhe in Cape Town, the Montagu and Ashton Community Project, Community Development Resource Association, Food and Allied Workers Union in Durban, Mboza Village Development Project in Natal and Thusanang Cooperative in Brits, Transvaal).

All who attended agreed that the meeting had been very useful and that much had been achieved in the two days. One comment was; "It's nice to hear that the stories are not all romantic, unlike what one reads in the literature". Many felt less isolated because of meeting other people working in the same field.

The next meeting of the Workteam Collective will be held in August in Cape Town. Anyone interested should contact Alistair Ruiters, the interim co-ordinator of Workteam, at 021-6502739.

Violence and the 'Peace Process' in Pietermaritzburg

A COLLECTIVE OF PIETERMARITZBURG ACTIVISTS explains how State repression has led to the breakdown of the 'peace process' and calls for pressure to be put on the State to release detainees and lift the political restrictions so that the process can continue.

After Inkatha broke off the Maritzburg peacetalks in December 1987, ostensibly because UDF/COSATU were reluctant to repudiate *Inqaba Yabasebenzi*, numerous press statements during late December and January by Inkatha officials and Gatsha Buthelezi suggested that Inkatha was not interested in peace and was unwilling to continue with the peace process. However Inkatha had not officially broken-off the peace-talks. It would seem that the Chamber of Commerce (CC) played a crucial role in maintaining Inkatha's official commitment to the peace process during this time.

The question of including national leaders in the peace process

In a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce the UDF/COSATU delegation made it clear that they are not opposed in principle to including national leaders in the peace process provided the agenda of the meeting focuses on the peace process in the Pietermaritzburg area.

At a meeting with the Chamber in February a proposal which made provision for the participation of UDF/COSATU national leadership

was presented to the Chamber, and they were to pass it on to Inkatha.

Detentions

On the 10 and 11 February most of the UDF's Midlands leadership was detained; viz., Martin Wittenberg, Skhumbuzo Ngwenya (Joint UDF-Midlands secretaries), Thami Mseleko and Reggie Radebe. All these are members of the UDF delegation in the peace talks. The detentions were not only restricted to delegates as in the next few days a number of key UDF activists were also detained. Already the detention of hundreds of UDF activists in the past few months had seriously affected the UDF's ability to consult, discuss and constantly seek a mandate from its affiliates. The detention of delegates was the last straw; it struck a severe and deadly blow to the peace process.

In stark contrast, not a single member of Inkatha was known to be detained during the same period.

Church initiative

The peace process mediated by the Chamber of Commerce seemed to have slowed down considerably during January and February whilst the death toll continued to rise. It was at this point that church leaders, acting through the SACC, started a new initiative. On the 12th February the UDF received a letter from Dr. Mgojo inviting the UDF to

a meeting with Inkatha on the 23rd February. But almost the entire UDF delegation to the peace process were in detention, and the UDF felt that it was unable to attend the meeting. After being informed of the UDF's position, Dr. Mgojo agreed to cancel the meeting. It was agreed with Dr. Mgojo that representatives of the church would also participate in the peace talks convened by the Chamber of Commerce.

State action

It is ironic that on 24th February the Natal Witness quoted Lechesa Tsenoli, (UDF-Natal), stating that Gatsha Buthelezi's allegation that the UDF are the "fetch and carry boys" of the ANC was inviting State repression against the UDF. The very same day the UDF and sixteen other organisations from engaging in any activities whatsoever other than administration and legal action, whilst COSATU was severely restricted. At the same time UDF leaders involved in the peace process, Mr. Archie Gumede, Mr. A.S. Chetty and Dr. S Gqubule were heavily restricted, therefore effectively barring them from making any contribution to the process.

It is ominous to note that on the same day the KLA caucus asked the South African government to give the Kwa Zulu police jurisdiction over all strife-torn black areas.

The banning, restrictions and

detentions effectively brought the peace process to a complete halt.

The UDF/COSATU noted with concern Minister Vlok's utterances in relation to the banning and State action and policy in general. Vlok is reported in the Natal Witness of 27 February to have said, "The police intend to face the future with moderates". Inkatha and its leadership is apparently part of the moderates. The fact that it was unaffected by the recent State action bears testimony to this. "Radicals, who are trying to destroy South Africa, will not be tolerated. We (presumably the police and Inkatha and other moderates) will fight them. We have put our foot in that direction, and we will eventually win in the Pietermaritzburg area", Vlok said.

As reported in SALB Vol 13 No.3, despite numerous affidavits and court interdicts against Inkatha warlords and leaders, they have been left untouched by the State.

After the bannings

On the 26th February, in a meeting between Vlok and the Chamber of Commerce, Vlok indicated his willingness to consider an application by UDF/COSATU to seek permission in terms of the restrictions to continue with the peace process. Such an application has subsequently been made.

The COSATU delegation was to meet the Chamber of Commerce on

the 12th March to seek clarity on Inkatha's response to UDF/COSATU's last proposal (including national leadership). This meeting was cancelled at the last minute by the Chamber of Commerce as a result of the axing of Paul van Uytrecht from its delegation. The meeting finally took place on 24th March. The Chamber was strongly criticised for unilaterally withdrawing Mr. van Uytrecht, general manager of the Chamber, from the mediating team. The Chamber and COSATU agreed to establish a procedure for including or excluding anyone in the future.

On Inkatha's response, the Chamber stated that Inkatha was unhappy about the size (10 of each side) of the delegations proposed by the UDF and COSATU. They wanted to have the latitude to increase the size of the delegation to any number they wished. Secondly, Inkatha was unhappy with the UDF/COSATU proposal to limit the agenda to the peace process itself. They felt that they should be able to raise any matter they wished. COSATU stated its unhappiness with Inkatha's demand for an unrestricted number of delegates. (What if the warlords also want to attend?) In addition COSATU felt that the agenda should be restricted to the continuation of the peace process.

Continuation

It is vital that the peace process

should continue. All parties are agreed on this. Although the death toll has been reduced significantly, people continue to die as a result of the conflict. The warlords still run free. The continued detention of the UDF leadership and hundreds of UDF/COSATU activists deepens the sense of disillusionment with the peace process by the rank and file

membership of UDF and COSATU.

It is imperative that the peace process be resurrected. This is only possible if all parties involved in the peace process put pressure to bear on the authorities to lift the restrictions on UDF/COSATU and allow its leadership to freely participate in the peace process.

(NO! to the Labour Bill)

NO! to restrictions

ORGANISE!

RESIST!

FORWARD
WITH **COSATU**
Special Congress
JOHANNESBURG MAY 14-15 1988

Cosatu Special Congress

The democratic movement regroups and moves forward

Report by KARL VON HOLDT

What was really impressive about the COSATU Special Congress was the consciousness amongst delegates of possessing real political power. The organised working class has become a force powerful enough to actively shape the course of history in this country. What's more, the militant representatives of their class know it.

For two days 1500 delegates from all industries, from all corners of South Africa, discussed the strategies of the state. They argued about the overall balance of forces. They considered the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic movement. And with militant confidence they resolved on immediate action

against government repression, as well as adopting a bold plan for a broad anti-apartheid alliance to challenge the strategies of the state. With these decisions, the workers and their organisations demonstrated their belief that the strategic initiative still rests with the democratic movement.

COSATU emerged from the Special Congress a stronger organisation. Fears were expressed beforehand that the Congress might be wrecked by the political differences between affiliates. But despite sometimes heated discussions, the final political resolution on alliances was a compromise hammered out between four affiliates and adopted unanimously. This represents a new level of political maturity in the federation.

Delegates interviewed by SALB agreed that the political debate was impressively sophisticated. Unions and delegations had clearly prepared themselves thoroughly on the issues at stake.

The mood of the Congress was militant, and delegates obviously believed they had the support of their constituencies in calling for action. Contrary to some newspaper reports, there was minimal support for "caution" or retreat. The debate around the three days of "peaceful national protest" centred on whether the protest should last for two days or three, and whether it should be linked to National Youth Day on June 16 or not.

This debate was not satisfactorily resolved, because of a lack of time, but there was no doubt of the overall support for powerful mass protest. In one union delegation which had a mandate to call for 3 days protest, workers rejected a suggestion by officials that they consider a compromise with unions calling for two days. "Our members are demanding action that will force the government to listen," delegates said.

It was highly significant that COSATU had invited "guests from the community" to attend the Congress. One hundred and twenty delegates from UDF affiliates, church and sports organisations attended with full speaking rights. This was a special provision, because the current political clampdown makes it extremely difficult for the democratic movement to assemble in any other way. But the fact that such a decision could be taken at all shows how far the 'alliance politics' of COSATU has developed. The Congress was regarded as a forum for the country's democratic forces to assess the situation and agree on the way forward.

The significance of the Congress for COSATU and the broader mass democratic movement can only be understood by analysing the overall national political situation as it has developed over the past two years. This means looking at state strategy, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of organisation in the mass

movement, and assessing the mood of the people.

In COSATU itself there was intensive discussion of these issues before the Congress. The COSATU secretariat produced a discussion paper which was widely circulated in COSATU and beyond, and went through many drafts. This paper served as the basis for discussion at the Congress.

State strategy - repression to clear the way for "reform"

The mass struggles of 1984-6 destroyed the legitimacy of the state's reform initiatives which were based on the Tricameral Parliament and the black town councils. The strategic initiative passed into the hands of the democratic movement. Since the declaration of the 1986 state of emergency, however, the state has regrouped around a strategy of savage repression. The strategy has been to smash organisation through detentions, harassment and fear. Vigilantes and kitskonstabels have contributed to this.

Having delivered heavy blows against UDF and community organisations, in February this year the state imposed restrictions which effectively ban UDF and several of its major affiliates, as well as other democratic organisations.

At the same time, political restrictions were imposed on COSATU. Amongst other things, the restrictions prevent COSATU

from opposing local authorities or boycotting municipal elections, from any involvement in developing democratic structures in the community in opposition to the state, or supporting a whole range of campaigns. The aim of the restrictions

tion is to roll back the gains made by the labour movement in the 1980s by tilting the balance of power securely back in the hands of the bosses.

Apart from these measures against mass organisation, the gov-



State strategy - smash the democratic movement

Photo: Afrapix

seems to be to break the growing united front between COSATU and UDF, to prevent any campaign against the October municipal elections, and generally to restrict COSATU to shopfloor trade union activities.

But on the shopfloor the government is providing another set of weapons to weaken the trade unions in the form of the Labour Relations Amendment Bill. Here the inten-

ernment is clamping down on the press, on campus protest, and threatening to choke off foreign funding.

In sum, the state has developed a coherent and sophisticated programme of repression in order to systematically smash what Vlok calls the "legal radical organisations" such as UDF and COSATU, rather than simply to contain them as was the case up until 1986. It is a

programme to "take out or remove revolutionary elements from society" in order to establish "security and normality".

The three steps of state strategy

Government spokespeople have made it clear that they see this programme of repression as the first step in an overall three-step strategy. The second step is to address the "socio-economic grievances" of the people in the communities which, according to the state, create fertile conditions for "revolutionaries". The big township upgrading schemes are a central part of this plan.

The third step in government strategy is to introduce political "reforms" so as to win some kind of support base among the people and gain legitimacy for the government. The National Council is one element of this, but it has not gained much support. The key element at this stage of political "reform" is the municipal elections in October. If the elections are reasonably successful, the town councils will become building blocks for political representation of "moderate" blacks.

But the government knows that this third step in its overall strategy is the weakest. Its only chance of success at winning even limited legitimacy for such "reforms" rests on success in the other two steps - that is, success in crushing the demo-

cratic opposition, and success in upgrading the townships.

Economic strategy

Parallel with its political strategy, the state has been developing a strategy to deal with the economic crisis in general and the state's financial crisis in particular.

At a general level, both the state and employers seem to have agreed that the key for raising profit levels and attracting investment to South Africa is to drive down the real wages of the working class and to restore industrial "peace" - that is, to restore the control of management and the submission of workers. This can only be done if the power and militancy of organised workers is broken and undermined. The Labour Bill is the key weapon for such an attack on the power of the unions.

More specifically, the state planners hope to solve the state's financial problems through privatisation of services and state corporations. This would reduce the state's expenditure, and enable it to concentrate scarce resources on security and township upgrading. Wage freezes in the public sector are, of course, another way of reducing state expenditure.

These economic plans, if successful, are likely to mean lower wages, an increased level of exploitation, and higher unemployment for workers.

State attack, mass resistance

This overall attack on the people and the mass organisations is an effort by the state to turn the situation around so that it can regain control of the country and its future. It is an attempt to tilt the balance of forces back in favour of the government so that it can regain the strategic initiative it lost in 1984.

This is what made the COSATU Special Congress so important. It had the task of assessing the overall situation, regrouping the democratic movement, and coming up with a strategic response. It is not often that a meeting is burdened with such weighty historic tasks. The price of failure through division

or inaccurate assessment would have been extremely high.

But it was not only the attack by the state which determined the agenda of the Congress. Delegates would also have to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the mass movement, as well as the mood of the people. Community organisations had been hard hit by the repression. Detention of layers of leadership, the breaking of many local structures and the difficulty of national co-ordination had all taken their toll. Within COSATU, on the other hand, political differences as well as the difficulties of consolidating so large an organisation, were hampering its ability to find direction. The net result was that by the

"The Bill is a monster waiting at the door"

At a union local on the East Rand visited by SALB a shop steward told his fellow workers that "the Bill is a threat to our lives. We have been harassed and victimised and discriminated against, with no way of fighting other than joining the union. So we joined the union to alleviate oppression. Now the Bill, by taking away all our rights, is taking us back to the old days. So we've got to fight this Bill whichever way, left or right.

"Comrades, it's like a monster waiting at the door. It's going to swallow each and every right we have gained so far. The government and the employers are trying to kill the power of the trade unions. If we surrender we will be in a very bad position."

Another shop steward said, "When the government introduced the state of emergency it did not explain the emergency thoroughly. Now with the Bill and the restrictions it is trying to explain thoroughly to the workers what the state of emergency is. The Bill, if we look at it closely, is not only to weaken our struggle, but also to indicate to the workers that the government we are always talking about is also the very people we are working for."

beginning of this year the democratic movement was somewhat directionless. Many activists felt pessimistic, and that perhaps it was time to retreat. There appeared to be a stalemate between the state and the democratic opposition. The difference was that the state had a clear programme of repression.

But at the same time, in the months before the Congress great anger and a mood for action seemed to be brewing in COSATU structures. A number of affiliates in the Transvaal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape began holding regular lunchtime demonstrations against the Labour Bill in their factories. In Johannesburg and Cape Town this spilled into the streets as joint factory demonstrations. NUM members held mass demonstrations above and below ground at 25 mines in the week before the Congress. Shop stewards interviewed on the East Rand and Johannesburg expressed their determination to take action against the Bill and the general clampdown by the state. They also described a growing movement to use the train-ride to and from work as a political forum. Workers sing freedom songs, discuss the Bill and general repression, and share ideas about protests and strikes.

A further sign of this mood was the widespread Sharpeville Day stayaway on 21 March, which took place despite a lack of mobilisation on the part of the unions.

Lack of direction in COSATU?

But while there were signs of militancy and readiness for action on the ground, the key question was whether COSATU would be able to channel this mood in a united programme of action. There seemed to be a degree of indecision and lack of direction in the national leadership of the unions and the federation about how to respond to the Bill and the political restrictions. This was reflected in the decision of the Executive Committee to postpone the Congress by a month - a decision which drew angry criticism from the leadership of COSATU locals at a national meeting a week later.

Tension mounted, as some affiliates accused others of wanting to postpone action, and were in turn criticised for wanting to rush into action without a thorough assessment of the conditions. Some observers believed there would be a fundamental division between affiliates urging retreat and "survivalism" and affiliates calling for action and advance.

Political differences seemed to have become more heated in the period before the Congress, surfacing in antagonisms at the COSATU Women's Congress in April. COSATU Head Office itself, in a secretarial report issued earlier this year, referred to political divisions, as well as to a lack of commitment

on the part of many affiliates to building COSATU as a federation. The report stated that many COSATU regional, local and national structures found it difficult to function because of a lack of participation by affiliates. These weaknesses are not surprising in such a big organisation only two-and-a-half years old, but they could prove fatal when faced with a serious attack by the state.

Given these problems, the Special Congress was faced not only with the task of responding to the state's attack, but also with the task of forging unity and a commitment to continue building the federation.

These then, were the factors that shaped the agenda and tasks of the Congress:

- * a comprehensive state attack to smash the democratic move-

ment;

- * hardline bosses in a strong alliance with the state

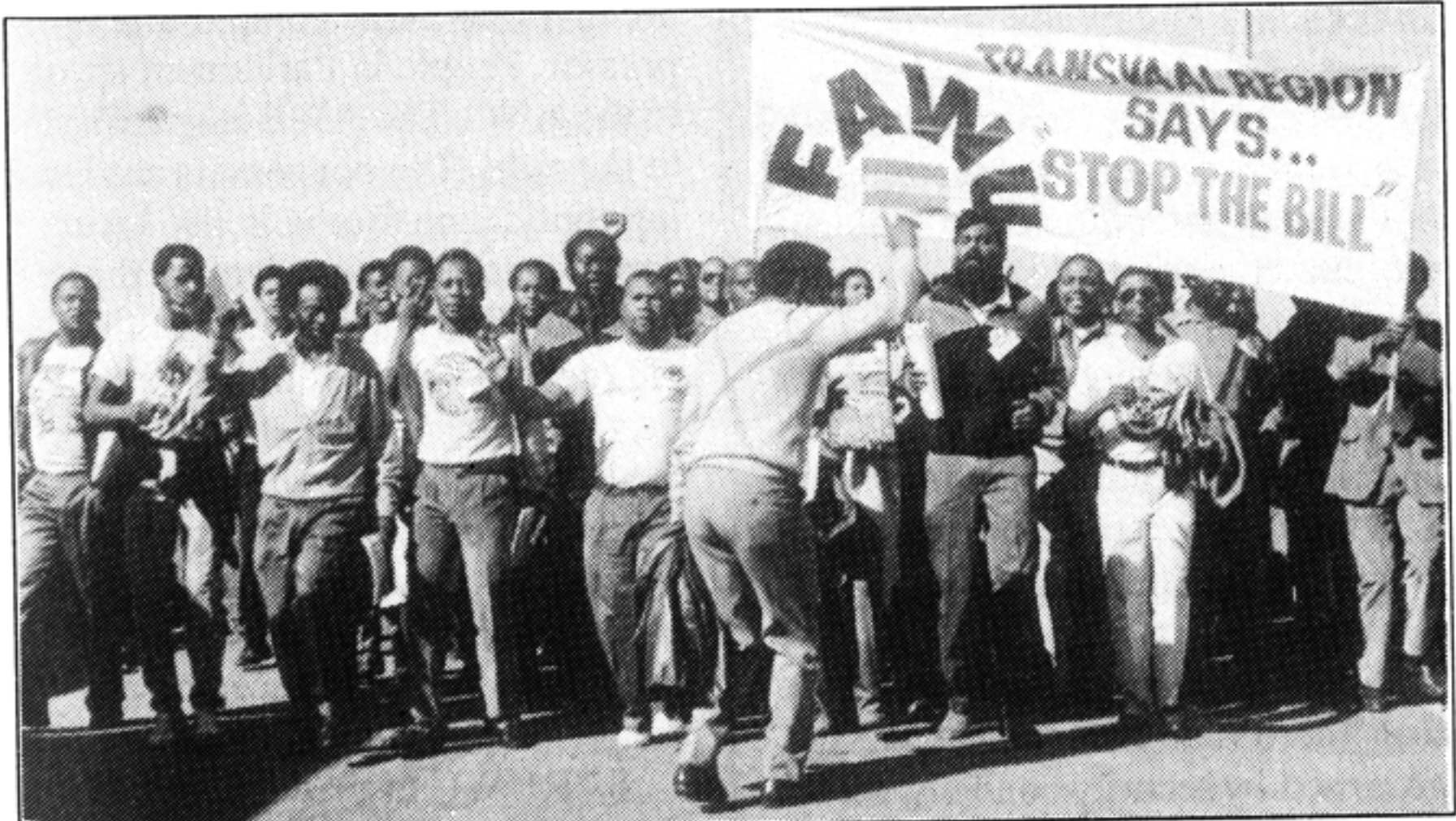
- * an increasing anger and determination to act amongst shop stewards and rank and file members;

- * a number of organisational and political weaknesses in COSATU.

The Special Congress

Establishing unity

From their hotels in the city the union delegations came singing in



The FAWU delegation arrives at the Congress

Photo: Rats Mayet/Afrapix

buses to the Flower Hall on Wits university campus. By mid-morning on Saturday 14 May, the giant congress was underway. After the President's address and the secretariat's report, the 1500 delegates settled down to the business of the closed sessions.

The discussion over the next day-and-a-half followed this sequence:

- * state strategy, capital's strategy, strengths and weaknesses of the democratic movement, and overall balance of forces;
- * reports of union action on the Bill, on the Living Wage Campaign, and on political issues;
- * resolutions on alliances and broad fronts, on immediate protest action, and campaigns.

Discussing the balance of forces

Despite differences over how to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the state and of the democratic movement, almost all speakers stressed the point that the state lacked political direction, and that the oppressed people have the will and the organisation to go forward. The key task was to decide on a programme of action for guiding the advance.

Speaker after speaker argued that "there is no government, we are governed by security councils, soldiers and martial law" (NUMSA), and that the presence of the military

in the townships "shows that the state is weak. Casspirs are part of the township furniture. We say to Botha, let him bring in the navy, we will deal with it" (NUM). The fact that "the state cannot rule in the old ways, but nor does it have new ways" meant that the strategic initiative still lay with the democratic movement (SARHWU). "The democratic movement is still strong the people's will to resist is unquestionable" (NUM).

Some speakers pointed out that "the state has a clear programme for advancing step by step" (T&GWU) and that "community structures have been weakened" (PPWAWU), but this simply meant the Congress needed to "come up with a clear programme to move forward" (T&GWU).

NUMSA pointed out that "there are divisions in the camp of the oppressor. People in Parliament speak to the ANC. The AWB is splitting to the right. The oppressors are losing confidence. Botha is also losing confidence. We must deepen these divisions. The state is not meeting the real grievances of the people, they are using security to eliminate the leaders of the community. The state is introducing new repression because of the strength of our resistance - this means we must strengthen our resistance and go further."

SARHWU argued that it was necessary to advance, "otherwise the government will simply increase

its attack. The conditions for resistance are still there, it is open for us to go forward. We cannot co-operate with the state-imposed restrictions."

To applause from the hall-full of delegates, CWIU pointed to weaknesses in the union movement. "We have failed to take action against the Bill - that is a weakness. We failed to support NUM and SARH-WU in their struggles last year - that is a weakness. We have to overcome these weaknesses, we have to take action."

This point was taken up by a speaker from the community delegation: "Organisation is consolidated on the basis of struggle. Organisation is not built in an office and then afterwards launched into the struggle. It is built through struggle, so if we are not going to act against Botha, we cannot build organisation."

The community speaker also introduced an important distinction into the discussion of the state: "The state is militarily strong, we cannot doubt that. But we are campaigning on the **political** terrain - where the state is weak. The state's weakness on this terrain is our strength."

Although there were differing emphases, the discussion during this session established substantial common ground between affiliates. Each delegation had caucused its position thoroughly. The fact that there was so much common ground suggests that at the mass base of

most of the unions the members hold a similar view of the situation in South Africa: that the mass democratic movement has by no means been defeated; that the state is politically weak though militarily strong; that the state's repressive measures must be resisted by all means; and that survival will be secured through decisive advance rather than retreat - that retreating would simply invite further attacks by the state.

Such an interpretation is supported by reports that shop stewards in some unions rejected suggestions by their officials that COSATU should adopt a more cautious approach.

Reports on union action

During this session unions reported on actions taken against the Bill, on the progress of the Living Wage Campaign, and on campaigns against repression and detentions such as T&GWU members have suffered in Pietermaritzburg.

Unions also put forward ideas for further action. Some suggestions for resistance if the Bill becomes law were for overtime bans, regular disruption of production, de-registration, non-compliance with the Labour Relations Act, and demanding to amend Recognition Agreements so that they neutralise the Act. As a response to more general repression, several unions proposed an immediate two-day or



NUMSA - "We should respond with a new strategy"

Photo: Mackson Tshikambu/COSATU

three-day protest action, but stressed that action should not end there but should be "continuous." Industrial area committees were also proposed with the aim of co-ordinating organisation and action in each industrial area.

The discussion during this session also revealed a high degree of unity. It became clear as the discussion progressed that most unions had taken similar action, and were concerned with similar issues. It was also clear that unions had thought carefully about a range of tactics to resist the attack on the trade unions and the broader democratic movement, and to increase pressure on

management and the state.

After this session the Congress adjourned for the night.

Resolutions on alliances

The discussion and adoption of resolutions was to take place on Sunday. This was the key session of the Congress. Up to this point the discussion had been broad and general. A fair amount of consensus had been achieved on the need to resist the Labour Bill and the political restrictions, and to develop a programme of action for advancing.

But now it was necessary to argue through the concrete details

of how to advance. It was in this session that the delegates would have to decide on a programme of action. But it was also in this session that political differences and suspicions would emerge most strongly.

The debate began with a set of resolutions on the question of alliances. The fact that four resolutions were presented on this question indicates a general view in the unions that the current situation calls for a strengthening of anti-apartheid alliances. But the resolutions also displayed deep differences over how to build them.

NUMSA and CWIU presented a composite resolution which called for "the establishment of a broad front of all working class organisations and organisations of the oppressed and exploited masses committed to working actively and unreservedly for the immediate end of apartheid. These organisations should participate in a conference to discuss the structures of the front and a programme of united action to end apartheid capi-

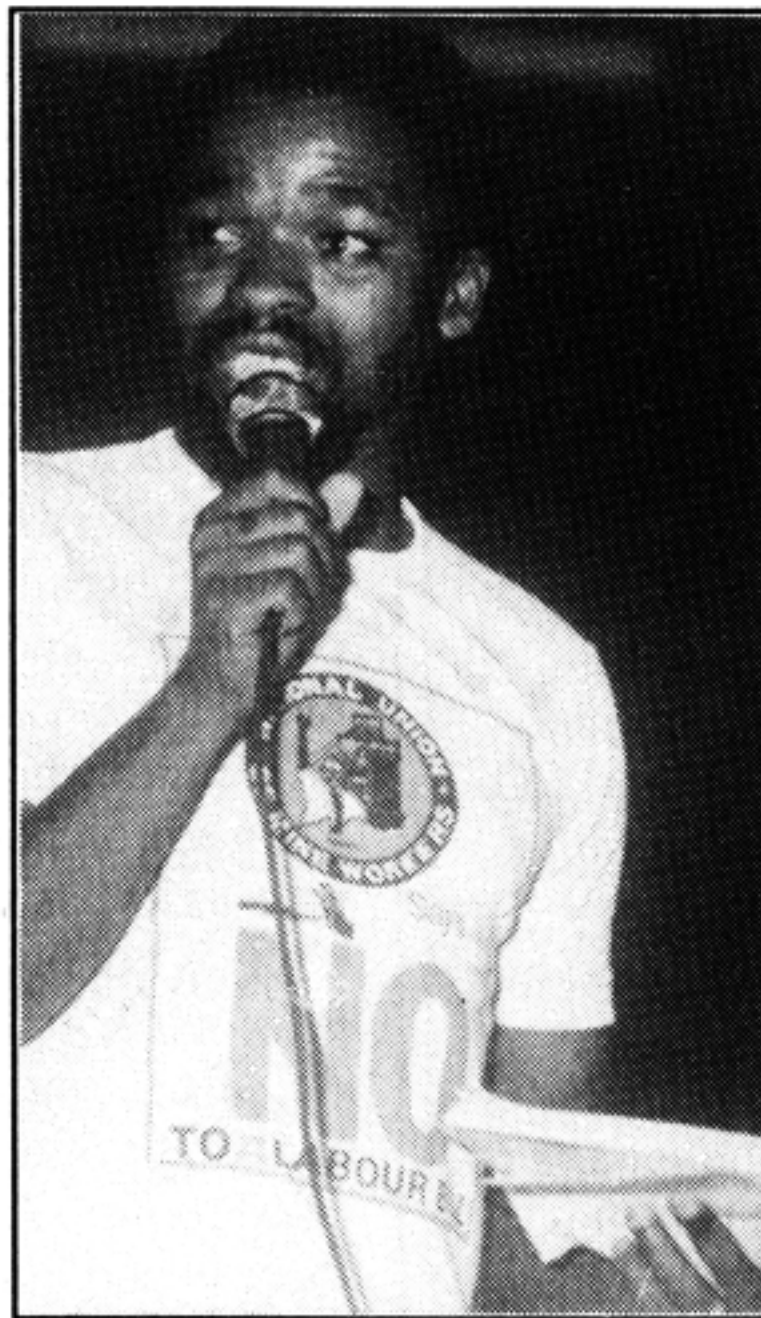
talism."

NUM tabled a counter-resolution based on the political policy resolutions taken at the COSATU Second National Congress last year, which called for a united front be-

tween COSATU and "tried and tested mass-based organisations whose political programmes are not incompatible with those of COSATU's affiliates." The NUM resolution stated that "COSATU and its allies, as defined in the Political Policy resolution, should come together in a conference to work out a Programme of Action which will unify the broadest possible section of the South African population."

T&GWU tabled a separate resolution, which called

for COSATU to convene a broad anti-apartheid conference. The union stressed in its motivation that the resolution should be distinguished from the NUMSA/CWIU resolution on two counts. Firstly, it was calling for a short-term conference against repression, rather than a front with structures. Second-



NUM - "...set the pace as an alliance willing to act."

Photo: Mackson Tshikambu/COSATU

ly, it envisaged a conference of all anti-apartheid organisations, including liberal whites, rather than simply a conference of organisations of the "oppressed and exploited".

Broad front versus united front

There was a long, full, and at times heated debate on these resolutions. The arguments in support of the NUMSA/CWIU resolution stressed the urgent need to broaden anti-apartheid unity beyond the united front of the Second Congress. Speakers referred to the divisions in CCAWUSA, and the tensions between NACTU and COSATU. "The state is coming with a new strategy, and we should respond with a new strategy," said one speaker.

Speakers added that such a broad front should not be seen as replacing the united front between COSATU and its allies. "Our allies are here in this meeting. Together we should agree on broadening the alliance."

NUM motivated its resolution by asserting the central importance of the united front "fighting alliance" - essentially an alliance of organisations guided by the Freedom Charter or sympathetic to it, at the core of which are COSATU and UDF-aligned organisations. Speakers argued that this alliance needed to be strengthened by de-

veloping a joint programme of action. If structures in the community had been broken by state repression it was necessary to rebuild them, not abandon them for new structures.

Delegates also warned that there were a number of organisations with very little history of action; "such forces are not willing to act. A conference will be bogged down in debates and principles and there will be no action. We should come together with our proven allies and decide on a programme of action. We can also discuss the idea of convening a broad anti-apartheid conference and see if it is a good one. Thus we should set the pace as an alliance which is willing to act. Then a broad conference would have as its basis the readiness to act. Unity is not born around a table, it is forged in active struggle."

After several hours of debate the two positions seemed no nearer compromise. The chair announced there would have to be a vote. At this point Cyril Ramaphosa stood up to announce that NUM had initiated discussions with the other three unions, and it seemed there was hope of a compromise.

There was a collective sigh of relief. A resolution supported by only half of COSATU would worsen the divisions. Nor would such a resolution lead to a successful programme of action. With the intensification of state attacks, this would be a dangerous outcome. Now, just when

division seemed unavoidable, there was hope.

At this stage the Congress adjourned for an hour-long caucus during which delegates from NUMSA, CWIU, T&GWU and NUM met to try and hammer out a compromise.

When the meeting reconvened tension was high. Had the delegates been successful? Had they managed to overcome their differences and forge unity?

Establishing unity

The chair called for a report. The CWIU speaker stood up. "Comrade Chair, we are very close to agreement. There are just two words where we still have disagreement."

He then read the compromise resolution, which contained elements of all three resolutions that had been put forward. Essentially, it resolved to convene a conference organising committee consisting of the COSATU Central Executive Committee (CEC) and its allies as defined by COSATU political policy. The task of this committee would be to develop a programme of action against repression, and to convene a conference of a broad range of organisations to discuss repression and ways of responding.

"Thank you, Comrade Chemical," said the chair. "Comrade T&G, what is your position?"

The T&GWU speaker came to

the mike. "We accept the resolution as read by Chemical," she said.

"Comrade NUMSA, please."

The NUMSA speaker moves towards the mike in the silence of 1500 delegates. "No problem, Comrade Chair." Delegates applaud.

"Comrade NUM, please state your position."

"We do accept the resolution Comrade Chair." Delegates applaud again. "We just have a problem with one phrase. It says the conference will operate according to broad consensus. We feel that might allow a small organisation to paralyse action by vetoing it. We would like that phrase scrapped."

T&GWU comes forward to speak. "That is how we understand it, Comrade Chair, as NUM put it."

"Comrade Chemical, what is your position?"

"Comrade Chair, as I said, this phrase was not resolved. I haven't got a mandate..." The CWIU speaker looks towards his delegation. Workers are waving their arms at him. "Comrade Chair, it looks as if my members want to accept the change."

"Comrade NUMSA, do you accept the amendment?"

"Com Chair, for the sake of progress it is accepted."

In some ways this was the most important moment of the Congress, both because of the unity it established in COSATU, and because of the actual content of the resolution. But the delegates did not stop to

congratulate themselves. They simply moved on to the next item - so fast that they forgot to formally adopt the resolution, and had to return to it!

Three days of protest

The second and last resolution that was discussed called for three days of "peaceful national protest". There was a lengthy and heated debate about whether the protest should last for two or three days. Only one affiliate argued that mass action of this kind was "unrealistic". Eventually, as it was getting dark outside, the matter went to the vote. The majority vote was for three days.

Immediately after the vote Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika was sung, and delegates streamed out of the hall. They carried back with them to their factories, their unions and their locals all over South Africa the news of a successful Congress, and of plans for mass protest.

Achievements of the Congress

The masses provide direction

The Congress was dominated by the mood of the delegates, by their determination to take action and advance. They were coming from constituencies that had been deeply politicised by the struggles of 1984-87, and that had taken part in unprecedentedly widespread industrial action in 1987. They had mobilised demonstrations and protests against the Labour Bill, and were deeply angered by the political restrictions on COSATU and the effective banning of UDF and 16 other organisations. In many cases they had stayed away on Sharpeville Day.

The Congress was a forum for these delegates to come together nationally as a federation and decide on the concrete steps for mobilising and resisting the attacks of the state. The shopfloor leadership was able to provide the direction and confidence that had been lacking before the Congress.



The masses provide direction

Photo: Tsuks Mokolobate/Learn and Teach

One organiser offered the following explanation: "You have to draw a line between the activists and the masses. The officials see that we do not have good attendance in COSATU structures, that our campaigns have not been successful, and they conclude that it would be suicidal to advance. They say, Let us strengthen our structures. That is true, but it is wrong to go further and say if we have problems we must retreat.

"At the same time the masses were speaking a different language. Despite three states of emergency, their industrial action had not stopped. Their struggles had not stopped. So the two groups were reading the situation from different angles. The masses were not saying this by talking. Their actual actions

showed that they were not talking about retreat, they were advancing."

Regrouping the democratic movement, finding the way forward

The Congress succeeded in regrouping and unifying the democratic movement around a concrete programme for moving forward. This programme consisted of concrete mass action (the three day protest) and a longer term strategy of alliances based on action.

The three day protest was seen as important for harnessing the anger of COSATU's membership as well as the community, and mobilising them for further sustained resistance to the Bill, the political

restrictions, and general state strategy. The protest would demonstrate to liberals and the international community that repression had not succeeded in crushing the democratic movement, and warn capital and the state of the anger of the people.

A number of delegates stressed that the protest should not be seen as a "once-off" action - action should be "continuous". A range of tactics were suggested for resisting the Labour Bill if it becomes law. Speakers also rejected the political restrictions on COSATU, and reaffirmed the political policies of the federation.

The longer term programme to challenge Apartheid is contained in the resolution on alliances. There are several important points in this resolution. Firstly, it sums up the mood of the Congress by stating that "we have the capacity to seize the initiative".

Secondly, it resolves to convene a conference organising committee "comprising the COSATU CEC and its allies as defined in the political policy resolution." This committee will "consider proposals for the development of a programme of action and organisation against repression," as well as call a conference of a broad range of anti-apartheid organisations to further deliberate" on repression and action against it, and which would work "on the basis of democracy, disciplined mandates and free and open

debate".

Thus the resolution contains both NUM's suggestion that an ongoing programme of action should be developed by COSATU and its proven allies (ie. the "democratic movement"), as well as the NUMSA/CWIU suggestion of calling a broad anti-apartheid conference in order to broaden the base of resistance to apartheid.

This process implicitly recognises the centrality of COSATU's united front with its "proven allies" - a point which is made explicit further on in the resolution. Some observers have interpreted the resolution to mean that the united front has failed or been superseded, whereas the resolution seems to place the united front at the core of a broad anti-apartheid alliance.

An issue which has yet to be clarified is whether the broad conference is a conference of the "oppressed and exploited", as envisaged in the original NUMSA/CWIU resolution, or whether it would also include liberal organisations in the white sector, as envisaged in the original T&GWU resolution.

New strategies, new tactics?

Before the Congress it had seemed that one of the major issues for debate would be whether it was time for the democratic movement to retreat and consolidate organisation. This was linked to the question

whether the state is strong or weak: if the state is strong, the democratic movement should retreat; if weak, it should advance.

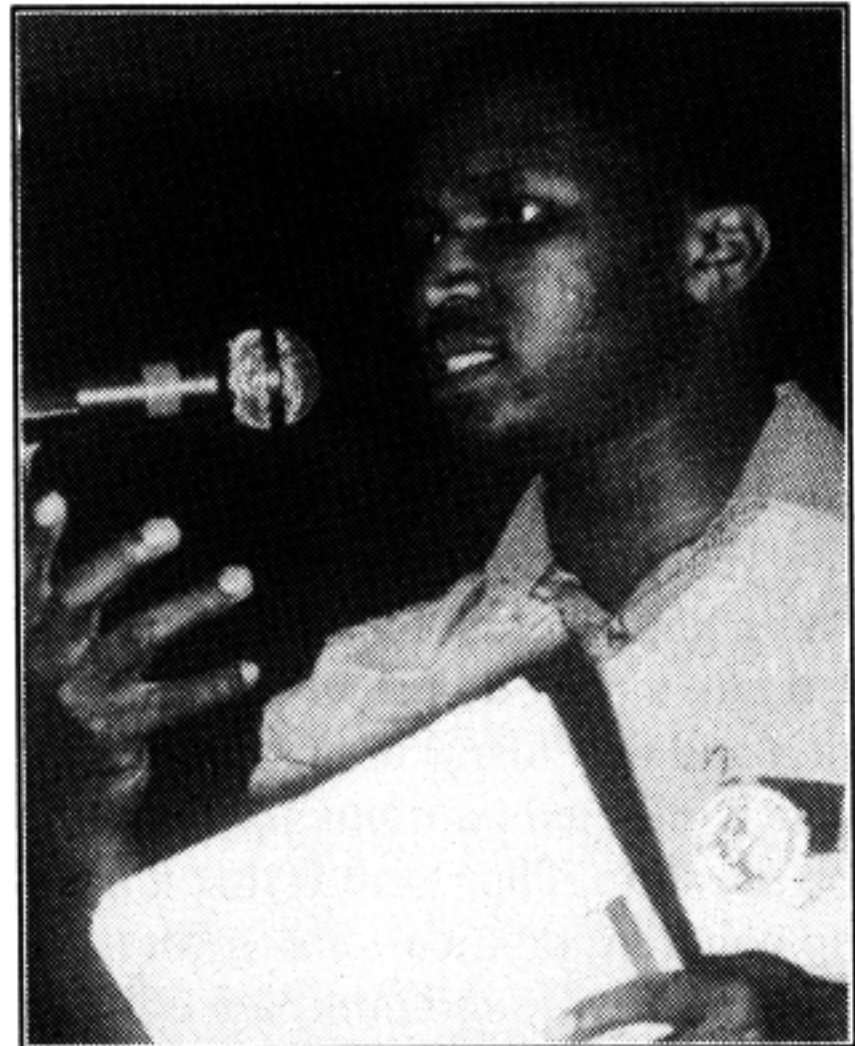
By the time of the Congress most affiliates had reformulated the question. Virtually no-one was arguing that COSATU should retreat because it was weak and the state was strong. All but one affiliate argued the need for decisive action. All argued that the state lacked political direction.

However, there were different emphases. A NUMSA delegate believes that underlying this debate was a difference over tactics. NUMSA and other unions were arguing that although the state has suffered setbacks, it is still fundamentally very strong. The strategies and tactics used by the democratic movement have registered successes, but these are limited. There is a need to honestly reassess these strategies and tactics so as to find new ways to move forward.

Organisations should not automatically call for mass protests such as stayaways, said the delegate, but should also develop "fighting tactics" on the shopfloor. Alliances should be broadened to include all organisations of the oppressed and exploited, not just the dominant Charterists. There is a need to question the effectiveness of "protest politics" - stayaways, boycotts, non-participation.

The NUMSA delegate felt that

unions such as SARHWU and NUM were arguing that the state is fundamentally weak because of the success of the strategies and tactics used by the democratic movement. They were, he felt, calling for an intensification of these tactics and



The debate was impressively sophisticated

Photo: Mackson Tshikambu/COSATU

strategies, rather than a reassessment.

It is true that SARHWU and NUM argued that the state has been fundamentally weakened by the mass resistance of the past few years. One discussion paper argued that "we have succeeded in smashing any illusions that the state may have about 'winning over' large sections of our people to support their reformist solutions. They have been forced to resort to 'naked force' to try and impose their solutions on

our people. In so doing they have already lost half the battle."

But the discussion paper does not argue against new tactics: "Our level of support in most areas remains very high, and it's up to us to find new ways of channelling this into new open mass struggles - as well as into other forms of organisation that can survive despite high levels of repression."

A unionist and UDF activist from this grouping said, "Our critics do not understand the complexity of struggle against the state. We do not see the political struggles of the last few years as "protest politics". There was a period of mobilisation that led into a period of semi-insurrection and new forms of organisation, which inflicted enormous damage on the state. The result is that it has no coherent political strategy, it is isolated locally and internationally, it has no legitimacy. These are achievements.

"On our part, the Congress movement has always been tactically flexible. We do believe organisations are currently developing a range of new tactics, but at the same time we see no need to abandon tactics that have been successful."

The debate over tactics is complex. It seems that "old" tactics refers to tactics with roots in the 1950s stayaways, the Congress Alliance, mass protests. "New" tactics refers to tactics based on organised shopfloor strength - factory demon-

strations, work stoppages, etc. - as well as broad alliances irrespective of ideological differences.

However, specific tactics cannot easily be linked to specific political positions. Unions across the political spectrum were suggesting a combination of "old" and "new".

To the observer, the debate at the Congress produced a rich combination of old and new tactics. There was the call for three days of protest (old), to be combined with factory demonstrations (new). A range of powerful shopfloor tactics were suggested (new). The united front with COSATU's allies is to be strengthened (old), and a broad anti-apartheid conference convened (new). No doubt different affiliates will emphasise different tactics, but the interaction between different strategic and political viewpoints has been fruitful.

The overall assessment of COSATU assistant general secretary Sydney Mafumadi is that "a composite position was achieved - that the state is strong, that it has reserves of power, but that it has its own weaknesses. Congress was unified on the need to engage those weaknesses so as to undermine its strength and drain its reserves."

Trade unions and community organisations

Some observers have suggested that the Congress showed that the trade union movement has become

politically more important than the community organisations, the UDF, and so on. They suggest that it is now the trade union movement that is setting the direction.

It is certainly true that the trade unions have got the legal space, the democratic structures, the organised constituency, and the power on the shopfloor, which community organisations lack at this point. COSATU convened the Congress and invited the community, not the other way round. COSATU was represented by 1500 mandated delegates representing a mass base of 700 000 members.

However, it is difficult to make such a clear distinction between trade unions, community organisations and the liberation movement. Many of the trade unionists who spoke are also UDF and civic activists. Many shopstewards are active in street committees and youth organisations. At least four speakers had spent periods on Robben Island for ANC activities. The political reference points in many slogans, songs and speeches are the organisations and personalities of the liberation movement. It is only through understanding these factors that one can explain why shopstewards participated in and helped organise the Sharpeville stayaway, despite a lack of mobilisation on the part of formal union structures.

There are differences though. One union delegate criticised the community delegation for taking a

"partisan stand by strongly attacking the NUMSA/CWIU resolution. They should have let the unions debate thoroughly before putting their views. They should also have been open in admitting that state repression has seriously affected structures in the community."

Despite these differences, with great unevenness and regional variation, trade union, community and political organisation seem to be linking up more and more. The significance of COSATU and its structures is that it is placing organised workers at the centre of decision-making and action in this movement.

Politics and unity in COSATU

One of the most important achievements of the COSATU Congress was the unity it achieved between affiliates with political differences. The common threats and problems faced by all workers and all affiliates no doubt contributed to the drive for unity. At the same time there is a new political maturity in the federation, a recognition that the costs of division are too high.

It is probably also true that the mass political struggles since 1984 have heightened general political consciousness, so that the sharp division between 'workerism' and 'populism' has given way for a more uniform political perspective in which most people agree on the

need for alliances with the community, and for unions to take up political issues.

The deep differences now are over how to build alliances and how to take up politics. These differences exist not only between unions, but also within unions. It is superficial to argue - as some commentators have - that the "balance of forces" between different political groupings in COSATU is becoming more evenly balanced simply because NUM lost 50 000 members in last years' strike.

"Balance of forces" is not simply established by arithmetic and counting delegates. One would have to analyse the dynamics and changing political currents within each union in order to establish such trends.

Political divisions often worsen when an organisation is suffering setbacks. No doubt the blows of state repression, as well as the general lack of direction earlier this year, contributed to the political tensions in COSATU. By deciding on a course of action backed by everyone, the Congress provided the very direction that was lacking.

This was apparent in the recent COSATU Witwatersrand Regional Congress held on 19 June. This was a region once racked with tensions and disunity between 'populists' and 'workerists'. The Congress - held to

discuss the National Congress resolutions and a programme of action - was characterised by a spirit of unity and by agreement on virtually every point. This was possible because there was a common reference point in the success of the three-day action and in the national resolutions.

The political differences will continue to exist in COSATU. They may well emerge in differences over the convening of the anti-apartheid conference. But at least now they have a common programme and framework within which to work together.

The road ahead

The Congress might well provide a turning point in resistance to apartheid. Mass militancy has been channelled into a concrete programme of action. The Congress deepened and strengthened the united front. At the same time, a broad anti-apartheid conference could provide a massive boost to the anti-apartheid movement by strengthening the unity of the opposition and further isolating and discrediting the government and its reforms. If successful, these initiatives could resolve the current stalemate in favour of the democratic movement.



The COSATU National office-bearers, (from left) Jay Naidoo, General Secretary; Sydney Mafumadi, Assistant General Secretary; Chris Dlamini, Vice-President; Elijah Barayi, President and Fred Gona, Second Vice-President, all sing the National Anthem at the end of the Congress.

The next edition of the Bulletin will carry an analysis of the three-day stayaway.

Deepening the united front, broadening the anti-apartheid alliance

SALB interviews Chris Dlamini, vice-president of COSATU, soon after the federation's Special Congress in May.

Chris Dlamini is a full-time shop-steward at Kellogg's S.A, the local subsidiary of the giant American multi-national. SALB interviewed Dlamini in his office at the Kellogg's plant in Springs, on the East Rand. On the wall of his office, amongst the posters, cartoons and newspaper clippings, there is a framed document displaying two quotes which seem especially relevant to the situation facing COSATU at present. The document was a gift to Dlamini from a black American director on the Board of the parent company in the United States:

"There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an Idea whose time has come" - Victor Hugo

"Progress always involves risk - you can't steal second base and keep your foot on first" - Frederick Wilcox

SALB: *What was the significance of the Congress?*

Dlamini: The Congress came at a very significant time in our struggle. The political crisis in our country is getting deeper, and the state has

made it clear what its response to the crisis is going to be. The banings on progressive organisations such as the United Democratic Front, and the restrictions on COSATU, show that the programme of the state is basically to

smash the democratic movement. At the same time, the government has introduced the Labour Relations Amendment Bill in Parliament. This poses a very serious threat to us as a trade union movement, to our strength on the shop floor.

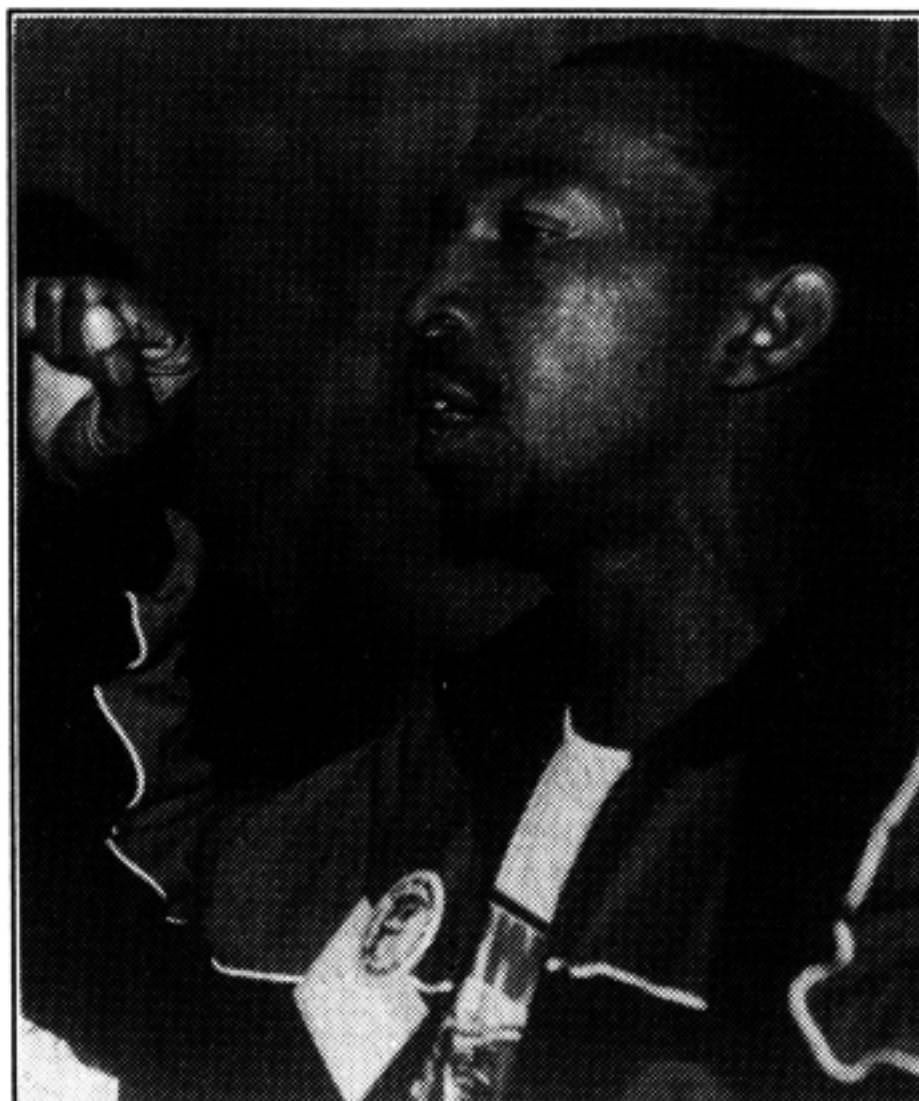
So you can see that we are facing a serious attack by the state. The Congress was important because it was a forum for organisations to respond to that attack, to develop our response.

The importance was that the Congress showed that our people are militant and ready for action. The mood of the people is that there can be no accepting the actions of the state. There is no doubt about that.

If you look further, it was significant that the Special Congress built on the resolutions taken at the Second National Congress last year.

Everyone knows that the Second Congress adopted the Freedom Charter, which is the document accepted as a guide by most progressive organisations in South Africa. This move showed clearly that COSATU has an alliance with progressive organisations in the community, and that COSATU is a part of the mass democratic movement struggling for freedom in the country.

By this move the Second Congress helped to develop the unity of the mass democratic movement, and it also gave it a clearer ideological po-



COSATU Vice-President Chris Dlamini

sition. The importance now of the Special Congress is that it consolidated that.

You no longer have a situation whereby different organisations simply adopt the Charter and stop there. But now you have a situation where these various organisations will come together to formulate a joint strategy and programme of action. This has never happened before. Now we will see an even clearer ideological direction developing from a common strategy and action. One would expect the leading role of the working class to come up more clearly in the process. The Congress also decided that COSATU and its allies will convene a broad anti-apartheid conference. This will enable us to develop an anti-apartheid alliance that is as

broad as possible. It is significant that the Congress decided on the strategy of building a broad alliance of all anti-apartheid organisations, irrespective of ideological differences.

SALB: *On the one hand you want to strengthen the united front based on the Freedom Charter, but on the other hand you want to build a broader anti-apartheid alliance with forces that have not adopted the Freedom Charter, or are even opposed to the Charter. Isn't there a contradiction in these two aims?*

Dlamini: We do not see a contradiction, we see both aims happening at the same time. On the one hand our CEC is to meet with our allies to work out a programme of action. Most of our allies have adopted the Charter.

On the other hand, the same meeting will plan and convene the broad anti-apartheid conference. The need for unity has always been there, but now the repression from the state is affecting all organisations and all people in South Africa. This has given a push towards maximum unity.

It would be important for COSATU and its allies to bring closer all the anti-apartheid forces, even if they don't share the same programme that we have. There is a need for the mass democratic movement to bring closer those of our people who are

opposed to apartheid, so that you can see the divide between the forces that are behind apartheid and those forces against apartheid. That is our responsibility.

SALB: *Would the conference include NACTU?*

Dlamini: It would be thrown open to a broad range of organisations, disregarding political affiliation. So NACTU would also come in if it was prepared to do so. Even if the PFP was to come it would be welcome. We would not expect the conference to adopt the Freedom Charter. The basic guidelines would be anti-apartheid unity and a willingness to take action. At the same time, COSATU and its allies will come with a programme of action. We will be the most powerful force at the conference.

SALB: *There was a big community delegation at the Congress, with full speaking rights. This was not the case at previous Congresses. What was the significance of this?*

Dlamini: Previously COSATU has had guest speakers from UDF and from the youth. This started with the birth of COSATU and the clear political stand taken by the federation. But you are right to point out that for the first time in COSATU there was a meeting that involved the community organisations and all other groups that are

seen to be progressive in terms of the political resolution adopted by COSATU at the national congress in 1987.

As you know, in South Africa there has always been a belief within the government, and the employers in particular, that trade unions cannot be mixed with political issues, meaning that trade unions cannot sit with other organisations in structured meetings and discuss trade union programmes as well as community programmes. But at the Congress you could see the bringing together of all the programmes, community and trade union, marrying the two together and coming with one concrete direction.

SALB: *Was there any resistance in COSATU to inviting community organisations to the Congress?*

Dlamini: At the CEC where the decision was taken affiliates were unanimous on the need to invite our allies. They took into account that the state is trying to narrow the legal space for organisations to operate in. As organisations that still are allowed to operate, the trade unions are obliged to invite the entire democratic movement.

SALB: *What direction did the Congress set for the future?*

Dlamini: It broke down the barriers, that workers should tackle their own problems, community or-

ganisations should tackle their own problems, and political organisations should tackle their own problems. Congress seemed to accept that the problems faced by working people are the same as those faced by community organisations, and they also have an effect on political organisations - so the problems were grouped together and said to be an attack on all the people. So people came out with the decision that the response should be directed at all these attacks.

In terms of action, as the Congress was representative of all social groups in the country, so the action will include everyone. That will be a signal to the government that workers and the community are no longer prepared to take the attacks without responding.

The Congress adopted a declaration condemning 40 years of Nationalist rule. People took a very clear stand, that they don't accept the bannings and restrictions. Their mood of defiance indicated that they are taking their destiny in their own hands. They do not accept the sincerity of the government and its reforms. This has implications for the Municipal Elections which are coming up, although we are not allowed to freely debate the issue because of the Emergency restrictions.

SALB: *Will the protest action be a success?*

Dlamini: Looking at the mood of the workers, since there was talk of this Bill, the workers have wanted to act. We have seen demonstrations in hundreds of factories where we are organised. We have seen workers arrested in hundreds in some areas when they went onto the streets to protest. We have heard in many of our locals where shop stewards have talked about the restrictions on COSATU, that it cannot oppose the municipal elections in October, and they are saying that cannot be accepted because the elections will directly affect them.

That is proof that the workers are ready to do something. When the Congress was postponed the first time, shopstewards were very unhappy. They came out openly, saying the workers were ready to take immediate action. It is clear that people on the ground are ready to take action. At the Congress itself there were 1500 delegates.

Those are representatives from the ground. Those are the people who are going to take action, and they are the ones who took the decision. So their action is likely to be a success.

SALB: *Before the Congress it seemed from what people were saying that the major debate would be whether to advance or retreat. Has that been an issue of debate?*

Dlamini: In formal structures that has never been an issue, but in informal structures in unions that was an issue. But the idea of not advancing never gained much support. The argument that people have been putting forward is that the situation we find ourselves in, under serious attack from the state, is because of the struggle our people have waged, the action they have taken. To retreat now is not going to mean the Department of Manpower will withdraw the Bill, or that the Minister will lift the restrictions. In fact retreat will make it worse.

If we retreat Manpower will go ahead with the Bill, and include provisions that are not there now, but that are even worse for the unions. The Minister would probably extend the restrictions on COSATU to cover affiliates too. Recently it seemed they wanted to ban union meetings, but that was prevented because of opposition by workers. They would probably put that into operation if we decided to retreat. So the question of retreat was put aside by the majority of workers. At Congress there was no significant opposition to action.

SALB: *So what you are saying is that to retreat now would invite the state and the employers to increase their attacks further?*

Dlamini: Right, and erode all the gains that workers have made so far,



Workers versus the new Labour Bill

Photo: Tsuks Mokolobate/Learn and Teach

and even transform unions into liaison committees.

SALB: *What do you foresee in terms of action from the state, now that COSATU has taken the position of advancing?*

Dlamini: We do expect that the state will move against certain people, mainly leadership in COSATU and also in certain affiliates - that we can't rule out. People should know that and work out ways to respond if that happens.

SALB: *Is there any prospect of forcing the state to retreat, to withdraw from its attack?*

Dlamini: I for one don't think I can answer that. The state is intent on crushing all resistance, and for it

to retreat would mean forcing it to agree that there should be change in the country. I believe that there are some people in the government and business circles who are beginning to realise that there are struggles and there are demands that the workers and the people as a whole cannot abandon. They mean life or death to the people - like the question of housing, the question of unemployment, and all the political issues affecting the people. There is no way people can put them in the background and forget about them, because they affect the people directly.

With this understanding I think there are some people who are going to make the government realise there are fundamental issues which need to be addressed. I don't

know if you can call them divisions, but they are different points of view that one starts to see. For instance, Nothnagel stating that the banned organisations will have to be brought in if there is to be lasting peace.

SALB: *Apart from the task of uniting progressive organisations, and unifying anti-apartheid forces more broadly, are there not more concrete organisational tasks in COSATU?*

Dlamini: Our organisational tasks have not changed. We have made some progress in moving to one industry, one union. But actions that we decide on often mobilise workers who are not part of our structures. We must bring those workers into our structures. There are also unions outside that must come in, so we can actually say we have one country, one federation. We have organisational tasks around the Living Wage Campaign. We need to revive this campaign, and revive Living Wage structures. This campaign should also cement our relations on the ground with our allies in the communities. We are fighting deteriorating conditions in the factories, they are fighting deteriorating conditions in the communities. We need to co-ordinate and join up these bread-and-butter struggles. COSATU locals also need to be strengthened. They are the founda-

tion of COSATU.

SALB: *What was at stake in*

the debate on the political resolution?

Dlamini: The resolution put forward by Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) was saying that if we want broad unity we should invite all those who are affected by apartheid. Those such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who opposed the resolution were saying if we do that we will get bogged down at the very conference as to whether to act or not. If you look at the history of some organisations, and the struggles waged by them, you find that there is no significant struggle that has been waged. Action was never taken by them. When they enter any meeting their position would be to stifle action. NUM put forward the resolution that COSATU convene a conference with its proven allies in order to build the united front. In the end people agreed to combine the positions in the two motions. We saw a unanimous resolution that we should get together with our allies as people who have a history of struggle, people who have been involved in action, and map out a programme of action. The resolution also stated that anti-apartheid unity should be

broadened by convening a conference where we can invite all organisations opposed to apartheid. That is why people agreed in the end, because the final resolution set out a way of moving towards the broad unity people are talking about, instead of getting bogged down and coming up with nothing.

SALB: *You have been involved personally in the struggle to build trade unions through the 1970s and 80s. You were involved in CCOBTU, FOSATU and now COSATU. How would you assess this Special Congress in the light of that history, what progress has been made?*

Dlamini: There has been significant progress made by our people in terms of the unity of the working class, and more particularly the working people. Unions had different views and understanding of issues - for example the unions were really divided between those who favoured registration and those who did not. All those petty issues have been thrown in the dustbin. Now you have the majority of people coming together and shaping the way forward, and at the same time responding to state repression. There was not that much antagonism displayed at Congress. Of course people did argue on cer-

tain points, but those points did not seem to set up a wall dividing those who were seen to be progressive from those seen to be reactionary. You had a debate centred around points that were inclined to unite a broad spectrum of our people. Also, all affiliates participated to the fullest, and everyone was free and open to say whatever he or she wanted to say.

In FOSATU we were involved in the unity talks with other unions and federations for four years. At the time it looked like we were not going to be able to build one federation. But we showed that the differences were not fundamental. People always differ ideologically - which is healthy, as one speaker said, it is healthy if people share views with the aim of coming up with one decision.

The unity talks prior to the formation of COSATU provide us with some experience. We can draw lessons from that for achieving unity now.

As FOSATU we did not see the need to link with other organisations outside the factory. But with COSATU we realised that if there are problems in the broader democratic movement, that cannot be solved by withdrawing from the broader struggle. Problems can only be solved with the conscious participation of the organised workers.

Political consciousness on the factory floor

SALB visited shopstewards at a factory in the Witwatersrand area to hear their views on the current situation.

We sit in the shopsteward's office and discuss the issues facing the labour movement. The window looks onto the factory floor where workers are operating machines and carrying loads back and forth. Every now and then a forklift plastered with yellow anti-Bill stickers passes by the window. We have to speak loudly to be heard over the din of machinery.

The first topic of our conversation is the Labour Bill. Moses, the chairman of the shopstewards committee, kicks off. "To me it seems as if the government sat and looked at what is happening - strikes in many plants, people negotiating for higher wages - and realised that if it could use a new law it could divide the workers. The Bill means there will be no union. There cannot be a union without structures and procedures. But most actions will be illegal, so the structures cannot sur-

vive. If ever a worker wants to negotiate higher pay or an unfair dismissal, the bosses will just say, Oh, that's illegal. Just like that. The government will be our union because it will say, 'This is the law'."

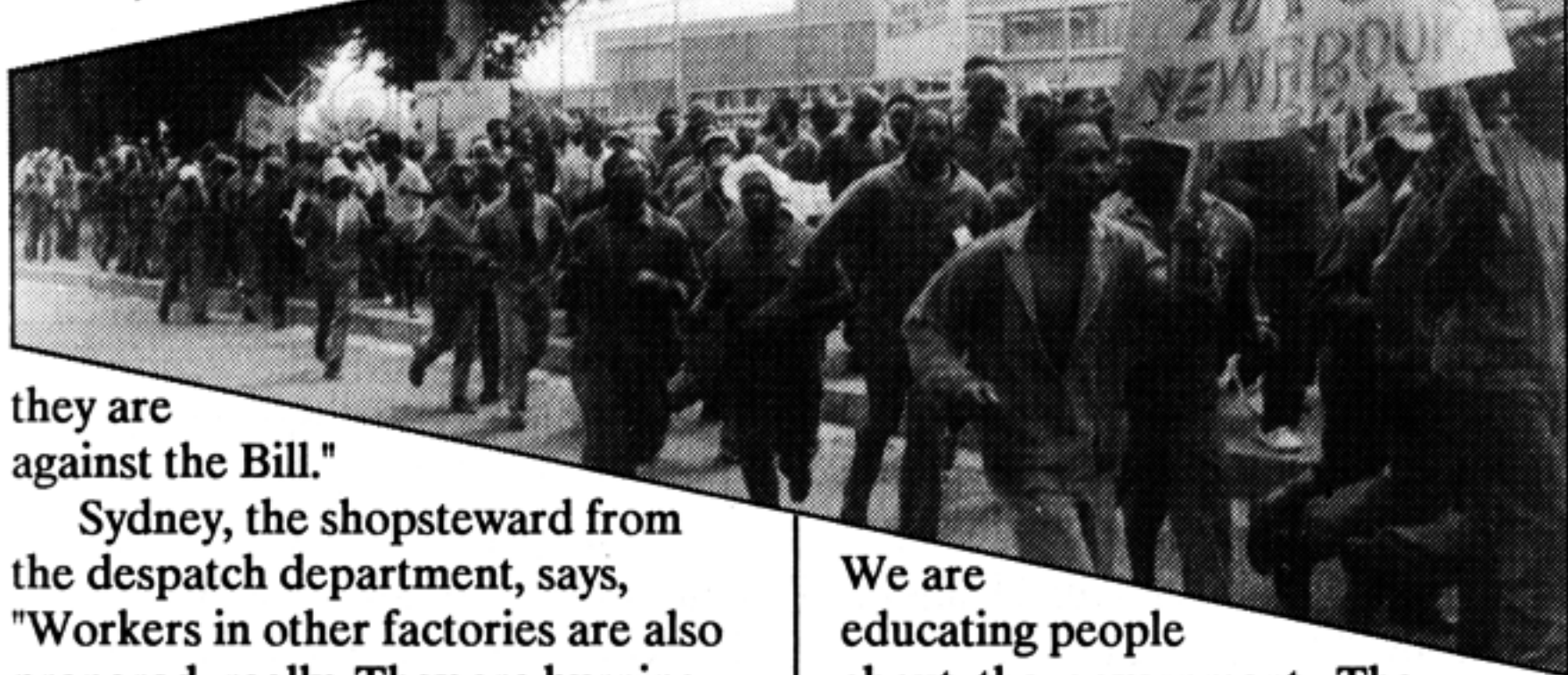
An older, greying worker takes over. "The Bill is going to kill our struggle for a living wage for all workers. It is going to tighten our hands and mouths. Our unions are going to be limited from here to there, and no further. They are going to draw a line that you must not jump over."

Thabo, a young shop steward, adds that big companies such as Anglo American support the Bill "because it will tie our hands. They have seen the mine strike and the OK strike and they don't like that."

The shopstewards describe their demonstrations against the Bill. "We demonstrated last Tuesday. We sang up and down from that cor-

ner to the gate about five times. We carried placards saying 'Away with the Bill!', 'Away with AWB!', 'Down with minority unions!'

"On that day people were dancing all over. The placards had a lot of messages for management. Our aim was that management should write a letter to Manpower saying that we are dissatisfied with the Bill. This was just a warm up. The workers are prepared to take any action, because



they are against the Bill."

Sydney, the shopsteward from the despatch department, says, "Workers in other factories are also prepared, really. They are burning. We are waiting for our Congress. If that is banned, something will happen. Then we are going to act strongly."

"To add to what the comrade is saying," says Thabo, "here we have an industrial area committee which meets every week to discuss joint action. Most factories on this side are prepared. There is even one NACTU factory in that committee."

"We are always preaching about this new Bill on the trains. It's a way of mobilising workers, especially in companies that have not been par-

ticipating. Then you find they are changing when they come to the companies. You see a guy at work singing who never used to sing before. He learnt it on the train."

The older shopsteward explains: "By chanting freedom songs on the train we are promoting people who know what is happening with the new Labour Bill."

We are educating people about the government. The government is bringing corruption in South Africa. That corruption is going to kill most of us workers. We are trying to clarify what is happening here in South Africa."

"And comrades," adds Thabo, "it is spreading, it is happening on more trains than before..."

The discussion turns to the political restrictions imposed on COSATU, and the virtual banning of 17 major anti-apartheid organisations including the UDF. Moses, the shopsteward chairman, speaks again: "Banning these organisations -

it makes us angry. By banning UDF, SAYCO, and other organisations, it is the same as banning us, because we work hand in hand with these organisations. So we the people must build unity and action to fight the restrictions. They are the same as the Bill.

"When they are hitting in our areas we are also hitting, because we are residents of those areas. So we feel that we are attacked by the bannings, and we cannot allow that. There are enough organisations underground, there won't be enough space for all of us if we go underground, really." The room bursts into laughter at this point.

Moses continues: "I don't think this will make any comrades working in this company or anywhere to not take part in politics. Because they have already learnt more about the struggle and about jailed leaders like Nelson Mandela. They have also learnt that there are other organisations. For instance the ANC is banned, but it is still operating underground. Restrictions will not stop people. They can only ban the name, but we are going to operate, we are going to discuss, we are going to preach wherever we are."

"We have been oppressed for a long time. Before we came our fathers were oppressed. When we came as a new generation we were oppressed as well. Now, bringing the union helped a lot of people. Even those who are oppressed have managed to get a living wage, some

of them. Some have managed to get better education for their children, some have negotiated for better housing and living conditions in townships. All those things were done by the unions."

The older shopsteward clears his throat and speaks: "Whenever one says something that is true the government calls it politics. By banning our organisations the government is declaring war, because it wants to prevent black people from moving anywhere that the government doesn't want. We the workers and all the people of South Africa see that the government is declaring war. In coming years people will not stand for such things. They will just take weapons." The workers in the room are nodding their heads in agreement.

Then Sydney turns the discussion towards the question of tactics. "It is true that people want to act. In the past we have used the stayaway, but we think the stayaway is not so effective. Staying at home and doing nothing - people just sit in the township drinking beer, or watching TV. They are not gaining anything from that. There is no action involved. Then after the stayaway we go back to work and nothing has changed. The state is used to the stayaway."

Thabo takes this point further: "Some comrades have proposed that we should come in to work as usual at 8. But we should not go to the machines, we should start demonstrating. Other companies would

be doing the same thing. Then the different companies can join up, and also get the other companies where there is no union, and small companies, and pull them out from their plant too. If every industrial area had such demonstrations - East Rand, Johannesburg, Kempton Park, Pretoria - and if the youth also had the same demonstrations in the township, that would be involving everybody. People would be really taking part in the struggle. That is the direction some people are proposing."

This discussion is cut short when a worker comes in to report that a labourer has been injured by a falling stack of boxes. Three shop stewards go out to see whether an ambulance has been called, and to take eye-witness accounts of the accident.

On our way out the shopstewards take us onto the factory floor,

showing us the anti-Bill stickers plastered everywhere. Prominent on the wall is a framed picture of Govan Mbeki with the caption, "Welcome Home!" Suspended over one of the machines is a poster with the words: "Happy Birthday Comrade Oliver Tambo", beneath a photograph of the President of the ANC. Newspaper pages with articles of political interest are pasted all over the factory walls.

It seems that politics is firmly rooted in the consciousness of union members on the factory floor. No amount of political restrictions will root it out. However, after the political restrictions on COSATU and the de facto banning of UDF and major affiliates, the key question is what organisational structures and what kinds of action will best serve to link the factory floor with the political struggle. (March 1988)

May Day 1988 around the world

May Day is International Workers' Day. LINDA COOPER and DINGA SIKWEBU report on celebrations and struggles around the world. ⁺

On the 1 May this year, millions of workers around the world came together to celebrate May Day - the workers' day. On this day, in marches, rallies, speeches, demonstrations and actions, workers everywhere gave voice to common problems, and a common goal, a better life, under workers' control. In this way, May Day unites workers in international working class solidarity.

But each year, May Day is celebrated differently according to the conditions in each country. This year in 1988, workers once again organised around their own particular problems and struggles, and stamped May Day with their own meaning.

Jobs and peace

In many countries in Western Europe and in North America, workers have won May Day as a paid holiday. But despite the advances won by these workers, today they are still facing many problems.

In these countries, the most important message coming out of this year's May Day meetings was, 'We demand the right to work! Give us jobs!' Like we have experienced here in South Africa, so workers the world over have carried the burden of the world economic crisis. Over the past 10 years as bosses have faced falling profits, they have tried to protect themselves by cutting the jobs of workers. So today many hun

⁺ The writers are staff-members of ILRIG (International Labour Research and Information Group) which is based in Cape Town.

dreds and thousands of workers face retrenchment, and a future of permanent unemployment.

In Britain this year's May Day rallies took place in the middle of a big strike by ferryboat workers, who are fighting against mass retrenchments and poor working conditions. On May Day itself, the owners of one of the ferry companies organised strike-breakers to work the ferryboats from Dover, in an attempt to break the strike. But in response, strikes broke out in other parts of England and Scotland, as workers took action in solidarity with the striking Dover seamen. With these actions, workers gave voice to the meaning of May Day, worker solidarity.

At May Day rallies in Germany, France, Italy and Austria, millions of workers protested against unemployment, and demanded the right to work. They also linked their demand for jobs to their support for disarmament and peace. They called on their governments to get rid of nuclear weapons which can cause mass destruction, and rather put money into the production of useful goods which can benefit all in society.

In many German towns in the industrial region of the Ruhr, steel companies are threatening to close down factories and dismiss thousands of workers. Here on May Day, German workers called on their government to stop wasting huge amounts of money on Jew and

terrible weapons of war, and to invest the money in new jobs instead. Unemployed workers also demonstrated on May Day with the slogan, "We don't want charity - we want jobs."

In Canada on the eve of May Day the Canadian peace movement organised a mass rally and march for peace and disarmament. In the spirit of May Day, demonstrators called for peace and co-operation between the peoples of different countries.

"Glasnost" - democratising socialism

In most socialist countries, May Day is an official holiday, supported by the government. This year on May Day, workers in many socialist countries demonstrated their support for what has become known as "glasnost" - the changes being led by the Soviet government to restructure their society, and make it more open to democratic participation by the mass of the people.

In the Soviet Union, President Gorbachev and other top leaders of the party and government looked on as tens of thousands of people marched through Red Square in the annual May Day parade. The march took several hours, and many workers and young people pulled floats or carried banners which demonstrated their support for their government's programme of reform. One float showed the figures



Namibian workers celebrate Mayday

Photo: John Liebenberg

of bureaucrats trying to slow down or stop "perestroika" - the restructuring of the Soviet economy.

In other socialist countries like **Czechoslovakia** and **Bulgaria**, May Day celebrations this year were also occasions where workers demonstrated their support for economic reform, and the deepening of socialist democracy.

But in **Poland**, May Day 1988 was a day of confrontation between many workers and their government. For the last few years, the Polish trade union movement has been split between those unions who support the government's policies, and the Solidarity trade union, which is demanding the inde-

pendence of trade unions from the government, and the broadening of democracy in Poland. The Solidarity trade union has been banned by the government since 1981.

A week before May Day this year, strikes began spreading amongst members of the Solidarity trade union, particularly the steelworkers. Strikers were demanding an increase in their minimum wage, the recognition of the Solidarity trade unions, and the reinstatement of workers dismissed for Solidarity union activities.

On May Day, the Solidarity trade union called for a national day of protest. When thousands of Solidarity supporters organised

demonstrations in a number of cities, they clashed with riot police, armed with batons and teargas. As the wave of strikes spread to the giant Lenin ship-yards in Gdansk the following day, nine members of the Solidarity leadership were arrested.

So this year's May Day in many socialist countries was a reminder that even where workers have won great victories in their struggle, they still face the task of building deeper and more democratic workers' control.

Freedom from repression and imperialism

In many countries, workers have traditionally used their May Day demonstrations to protest against political repression. They also take the opportunity on May Day to challenge imperialist countries like the United States over the support they give to repressive governments around the world.

In the **Phillipines** this year, workers organised huge May Day demonstrations. These took place at the beginning of a big wage campaign launched by the country's most militant trade union federation, the KMU. But speakers at rallies did not only call for wage increases, they also spoke out against the repressive policies of the Aquino government, and demanded the removal of American military bases in the Phillipines.

As thirty thousand people marched through the streets of the capital, Manila, workers formed a protective shield around their union leaders - many have received death threats from the military, or from rightwing vigilante groups. The march took place in front of a huge line of soldiers, armed with water cannons and rifles, waiting behind coils of barbed wire.

The march in Manila ended without violence, but elsewhere in the Phillipines May Day marchers were not so lucky. On one island, sugar workers were forced to cancel their planned rally, because they had received serious threats from armed vigilantes and reactionary landlords. On another island, police opened fire on 7000 plantation workers who were marching to their May Day rally. Hundreds were injured, and many demonstrators disappeared - snatched by police and men in civilian clothes.

In **Chile**, where people have suffered under a military dictatorship for the past 15 years, workers also clashed with government forces. Every year in Chile, May Day reminds workers of the time in 1970 when they elected President Allende into power to try to move their country towards socialism. But in 1973 Allende was violently overthrown by the Chilean army supported by the American CIA and big American business. On May Day this year, 20 000 people marched in the streets of the capital city

calling for an end to the military rule by General Pinochet, and for the return of democracy to the people of Chile. Armed police attacked the demonstrators, injuring three people and arresting 130.

Since November last year, **Palestinians** in Gaza and the West Bank have been in open rebellion against the Israeli occupation of their territories. Israeli troops have responded with great repression, and more than 15 Palestinians have died so far. On 1 May this year, Palestinian workers in these occupied territories turned their May Day demonstrations into a huge protest against Israeli domination. Israeli soldiers attacked demonstrators, and at least two people, including a 16 year old youth, were killed.

At the beginning of this year, a bitter struggle by the people of **South Korea** finally forced the ruling dictator to hand over power to a civilian government. But this new government still refused to legalise the democratic trade unions in that country. On May Day, 3000 students and workers demanding free trade unions clashed with riot police in Seoul, the capital. The police attacked with teargas, while students responded by throwing petrol bombs, setting alight three policemen.

May Day in Southern Africa

On May Day here in **South Africa** this year, outdoor rallies were

banned, but thousands of workers still attended indoor meetings and rallies organised by our unions. Speakers voiced the workers' demands for a living wage, and for more jobs. They also spoke of the urgent need to build worker unity and solidarity in the face of the government's attacks through the Labour Relations Amendment Bill, and the new restrictions on our organisations.

Elsewhere in **Southern Africa**, workers also demonstrated their commitment to working class solidarity at May Day rallies. In **Zimbabwe** workers attended big May Day rallies. In **Namibia**, May Day became the day when the NUNW (National Union of Namibian Workers) and its affiliated unions launched its "Campaign for a Living Wage". Close to 6000 workers attended a May Day rally in Windhoek. SWAPO Deputy Chairperson, Danial Tjongarero, told the rally that the workers struggle would be meaningless unless it was linked to the total independence struggle for a Namibia free from domination by the apartheid government in South Africa.

Solidarity between the workers of Namibia and South Africa was also strengthened when a representative of COSATU, Andrew Zulu, addressed the rally with a solidarity message. He said the workers in both Namibia and South Africa were gunning for freedom and independence. COSATU had passed

resolution at its Second Congress last year supporting co-operation with the NUNW in Namibia. An attack on the NUNW was therefore also an attack on COSATU. Workers in COSATU would not hesitate to take action in the case of an attack on NUNW, either by management or by the puppet government on behalf of its master in South Africa.

The president of the Namibian National Students Organisation (NANSO), also addressed the workers. He warned that as the workers' struggle reached new heights the capitalists would try to co-opt the students and the educated into the capitalist set-up. He called on students to be actively involved in the struggle and to build

an alliance with the workers.

In **Angola** tens of thousands of people demonstrated on May Day in Luanda, the capital city. They demanded the immediate withdrawal of the South African army from their country, and pledged themselves to rebuild their economy, which has been torn apart by years of war.

May Day this year helped to build solidarity between the people of Southern Africa. They all suffer the effects of the violence and war caused by the South African government's policies of aggression in the region, and they all share our common goal; the destruction of the apartheid system and the building of democracy and freedom in our country.

On May Day 1988 workers of different countries expressed their demands around their most pressing problems. But together, these different demands express the basic needs of workers everywhere:

- * the right to work
- * the right to a living wage
- * the right to build free and democratic organisations
- * the right to peace and security
- * the right to freedom from repression and foreign domination
- * the right to democratic workers' control over society.

May Day and Botha's Day

The continuing struggle over public holidays, by KARL VON HOLDT

Public holidays are important days in the life of any nation. They are days to celebrate great historical events such as independence from foreign rule, or important victories and defeats on the battlefield. Holidays also commemorate heroes and leaders, or religious events that are culturally important for the nation.

Public holidays tell a nation about its history, its aims, its values and its identity. They are therefore politically and ideologically very important days. In a stable society public holidays will reaffirm the moral authority and values of the ruling class. In a country racked with conflict, public holidays will reflect the struggles between different social groups.

South Africa is such a country. The AWB and the National Party struggle over the meaning of the Day of the Covenant, and the demo-

cratic movement struggles with the government over Republic Day, May Day and June 16.

The struggle over public holidays

It started in 1980 when the democratic movement staged anti-Republic Day meetings. In the mid-80s the labour movement and the popular movement in the townships managed to display their growing power by staging massive stayaways on May Day and Youth Day (June 16). In many companies trade unions negotiated these two days as paid holidays. These days became de facto 'People's Holidays', a celebration of the people's resistance and a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the apartheid regime.

Last year the struggle over public holidays took a new turn when

President Botha declared the first Friday of May a public holiday to be known as Workers' Day. This was a clumsy attempt to pre-empt the annual May Day stayaway with an official holiday which would have none of the international or socialist traditions of May the First. At the same time, it was a recognition that workers' demands could not be ignored.

US government sabotages May Day

Botha's strategem does have precedents. May Day was born in 1886 out of militant struggles for the 8 hour day in the United States. In the 1950s the American government was at the height of its anti-communist campaign, and it declared

1 September a national public holiday. This day was called Labor Day. The American government had exactly the same aim as Botha - to create a new public holiday for workers so that they would forget about May Day with its militant international socialist traditions.

The American government succeeded. The reformist trade unions turned away from May Day, and Labor Day became a celebration of American patriotism and hard work.

At the same time, there were militant groups in the American labour movement that continued to celebrate May Day. That is why, at

the same time as it declared Labor Day, the American government declared May Day to be Loyalty Day (although it was not actually a public holiday). The government intended that the people should affirm their loyalty to the United States, rather than celebrating their links with the international working class movement.

This year Ronald Reagan again called on the American people to celebrate their loyalty to the American government on May Day - the same American government that supports UNITA and destabilises Nicaragua!

Botha is not so lucky

Botha is unlikely to be as lucky as the American government. Last year, of course, the first Friday of May fell on May 1. Workers could not mobilise a stayaway since the day was already a holiday; meetings were banned; and so a day of struggle appeared to have been lost from the calendar.

This year, too, the government and employers probably heaved a sigh of relief at the thought that May Day fell on a Sunday, and Workers Day on the following Friday. There would, therefore, be no stayaway on 1 May, and employees would probably stay peacefully at home on the official holiday on Friday.

That's what the government and the bosses thought. Workers in a

number of unions, however, seemed to be determined to continue the tradition of struggle over days of ideological importance. This was seen as a necessary way of demonstrating resistance in the face of the government clampdown on UDF, COSATU and other organisations, the threat of the new Labour Bill, and continuing repression under the State of Emergency.

Thus there were a number of large, militant May Day gatherings across the country, organised by both COSATU and NACTU. The government banned planned outdoor gatherings in Cape Town and Secunda, and these were moved indoors. In Port Elizabeth the COSATU Regional Secretary is being charged after a meeting that had been banned went ahead, attracting an audience of 5000.

In a number of factories, workers negotiated Monday 2 May as a holiday.

Workers ban Botha's Day

But the struggle over Workers' Day - or Botha's Day, as it is known by workers - was even more interesting. Many trade unions took an in principle decision to reject Botha's Day. These include CWIU, FAWU and PPWAWU. In many cases this took the form of workers negotiating to go to work on the Friday.

CWIU seems to have taken a particularly strong stand. A national decision was taken that workers

would work on Botha's Day, and that it would specifically be excluded as a public holiday in all Recognition Agreements. According to Transvaal Branch Secretary Chris Bonner, a number of companies had no objection to keeping their plants open, while others, often under pressure from white workers and staff to take the holiday, resisted the demand.

At Colgate in Germiston, for example, white workers insisted that the factory should close for the holiday; management wanted workers to make up the lost production on Saturday. Union members would not budge, though. So the factory remained open, and black and white workers worked as usual.

In a number of companies, however, management refused to keep the plant open. Several groups of workers responded by actually going to work and demonstrating on company property or outside the company gates. This happened at Mobil, Liquid Air and at several factories in the plastics sector that fall under the Metal Industrial Council where Workers' Day is a mandatory holiday.

It seems, then, that Botha's move has been a massive flop. In fact, it has backfired by heightening the struggle over nationally significant days. No doubt employers are looking anxiously at next year, when May Day and Workers' Day fall in the same week.

May Day Meeting of COSATU Wits Region

The Southern Transvaal Region of COSATU held a May Day Rally, which was attended by about 2 000 workers, at Wits University. The mood was at the same time relaxed and militant, as the audience sang freedom songs, listened to speakers, poets and choirs. The day ended with two football matches. Jabula Foods beat Isikhalo se Africa from Benoni 4 - 1. The score in the match between Springs Local and Joburg Local is not known.

The meeting was planned at short notice, so speakers had not been arranged. Each COSATU affiliate put forward a shop steward to speak on behalf of his or her union. Speakers spoke about shopfloor struggles, the struggle for freedom, the Labour Bill and the political restrictions.

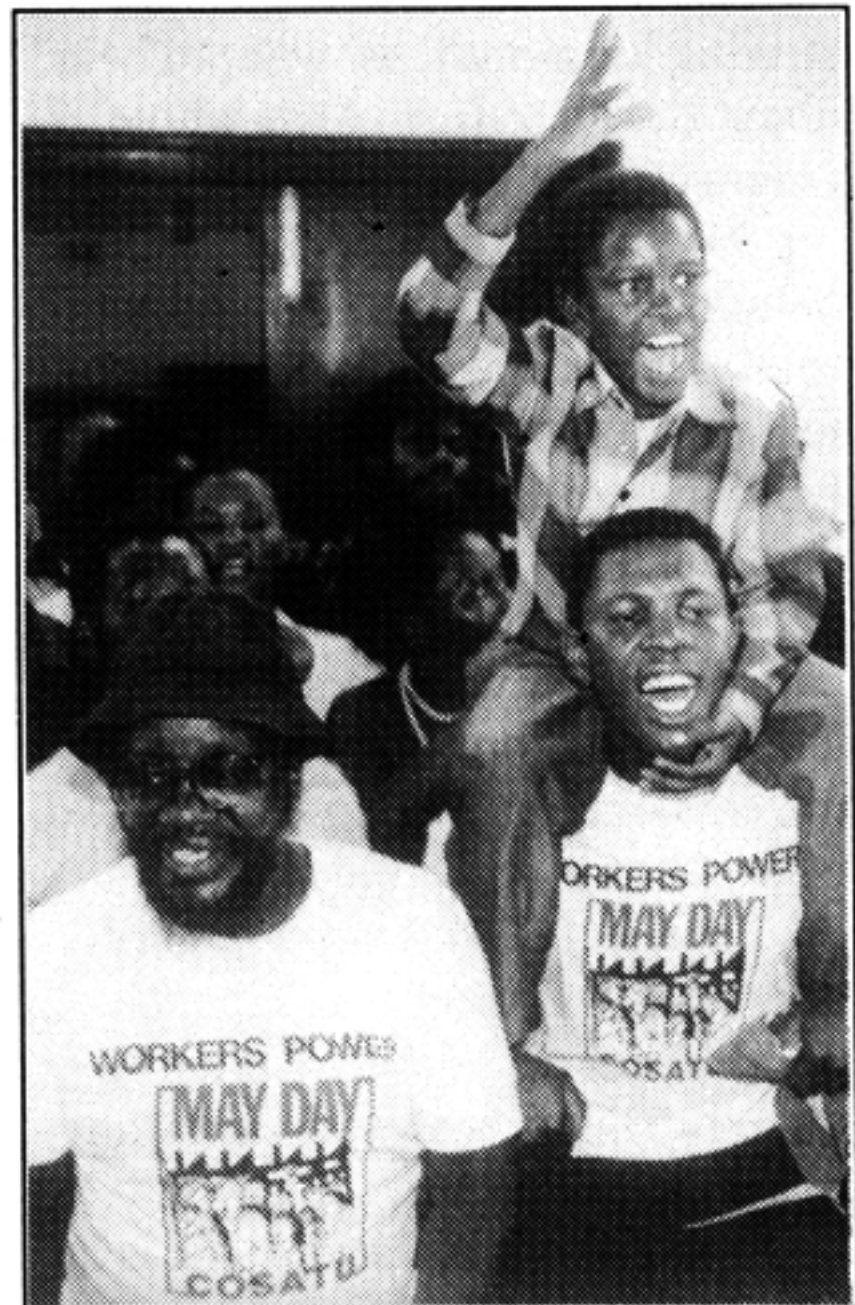
The FAWU speaker attacked Botha's Day: "Come you with hippos, come you with tear gas, May Day is the workers' day, and we will celebrate it.

"Botha is trying to sabotage May Day with his May 6. May Day is not just history or a story - it is actual struggle, because we are oppressed and exploited everyday in the factories. It is a day for fighting against

these things. We are going to work on the 6th, and we are going to celebrate today. We are talking about the day of freedom - either freedom will come to us, or we will go to it.

"In legal terms COSATU is paralysed. But on the shopfloor we will carry forward all the objectives of COSATU."

Later in the meeting a Young Lion spoke to the workers. This lion was truly young. He seemed to be



*Young lions and old lions
celebrate together*

about 10 years old, wearing a T-shirt that reached down to his wrists. He told the workers, "We preach about an injury to one is an injury to all, but often we do not

practice it. You struggle at work, but when you come home you forget about the struggle in the community." The audience whistled and shouted agreement. "You must not only fight for wages, you must fight for the liberation of the land."

The Young Lion continued: "I give you another advice: when there is a meeting in the townships you should attend it. We cannot fight alone without our parents. From now on we don't want to hear about striking for money, we want to hear about the liberation of the whole country!"

"You must not fight management only. There is a government too, which is making laws that protect the very employers you are fighting in the factory. You must fight the government and the employers. We want an end to capitalism. Forward to socialism!" The Young Lion ended his speech to roars of approval from the crowd of workers.

Then a NUMSA shopsteward addressed the meeting: "We must polish up our divisions. We know we are divided, but we do not want to accept criticism.

"The Labour Relations Act is a like a great rock hanging above the heads of the workers. It is sus-

pending by a thread, and Parliament is about to cut the thread, so it will fall and crush us. We must build pillars now that will support the rock when the thread is cut.

"If the Bill is passed we can forget about the workers' struggle. The Young Lion called on us to act - we have been slow in our struggle, but now the Bill is forcing us to take action. We have automatic members who wait to be told what to do. We need to educate our members so they can walk on their own and take initiative. We need one industry, one union; one attack, one defence.

"The struggle against the Bill could take about 8 years. Remember the struggle against influx control took about 5 years.

"I was surprised to hear the Young Lion say our strikes are about money. It is true. Most of our strikes are about money. You do not see demands for our rights in our strikes."

After the speakers the gathering was entertained by poets and choirs. Then the meeting adjourned to the sports fields for the football matches. The combination of politics, sport and culture at the Wits May Day celebrations shows how May Day has grown roots deep amongst the masses.

The Workers Library

57 De Villiers Street Johannesburg
P O Box 6214 Johannesburg 2000



*****Announcing.....**

a new library for workers!***

Education for liberation!

A new, dynamic library for workers has been started in 1988. The library plans to keep books and resources which deal with trade unions and the workers struggles in South Africa and internationally.

Films, slide-tape shows, magazines, government gazettes and surveys, etc., will be available to members and users of the library.

Campaign

The Workers Library has started a campaign to make people aware that workers and worker-leaders in South Africa have written many books about unions, the workers' struggle in South Africa, and their cultural and political activities. Books such as Solly Sachs' *Rebel Daughters*, Kadalie's *My Life and the ICU* and Mokgatle's *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*, are part of a tradition that continues today in literature such as *Ilanga Lisophomela Abasebenzi* and *Black Mamba Rising*.

The Workers Library hopes to collect all these books so they can be made accessible to all workers. So if you have books written by workers, or about workers, or any other books of interest lying on your bookshelves, please donate them to the Workers Library. Your name will be inscribed on the book on our special Workers Library label.

P.S. The Workers Library will have a public launch soon. Watch the press for details!

Conflict - in the community and in the factories

In 1985 violence exploded in communities around Durban. Youth fought *amabutho*. Pondo fought Zulu. Conflict spilled into the factories. COSATU was launched. Then UWUSA. How did shopstewards cope with this? How do they see trade unions and politics? SHAMIM MEER reports on interviews with 36 shopstewards in Durban, with a postscript by A Sitas. This is the second in a series of two articles.

1. Youth versus *amabutho*⁺ in Inanda

By contrast with earlier township experiences, the events of August, 1985 made their impact on all the factories.

The August 1985 unrest was

more widespread than the earlier unrest in Natal. All major townships around Durban were aflame as youth and Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* battled it out in the streets. In the words of Ari Sitas, "The carnage in Durban's townships in August 1985 left behind the burnt-out shells of shopping centres, the ashes of local government buildings, the gutted and looted houses, the 75 deaths and over 1000 injuries, the racial animosities, and social trau-

+ '*Amabutho*' is a Zulu word, meaning 'warriors'.

racial animosities, and social traumas ...". The trade unions and the shopsteward leadership were forced to reckon with these happenings as conflicts spilled over into the factories and as workers who were loyal union members by day were forced - or chose - to become *ama-butho* at night.

The events of August 1985 have been discussed in the Institute for Black Research publication, "Special Report: Unrest in Natal August, 1985", and in A. Sitas "August 1985, "Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods", published in SA Labour Bulletin Vol 11 No.4. The following is a brief description of the events.

Assassination of Victoria Mxenge

The unrest in Durban's townships began with student protests at

the assassination of Victoria Mxenge, lawyer and civil rights activist. School children in Umlazi, Kwa Mashu, Clermont and Lamontville boycotted classes and marched through the township streets in protest. Unemployed youth joined in the protest and soon thousands of youth were out. Workers, returning home at night, found a heavy police presence and militant youth ready for action.

By the second day of the protests, conflict between police and youth had heightened. The youth were trying to attack homeland government and quasi-political targets. They tried to bring more schools out. Shops of councillors who were also traders in the areas were attacked. Some were burnt. The schoolchildren began to lose control as lumpen youth began to join in the attacks, looting and acting in the 'name of the struggle'. In Kwa Mashu the police teargassed, baton-

The survey

We selected 100 large factories in Durban. One third of Durban's workers work in these factories, which belong to all the industrial sectors.

From the 100 factories, we then selected all the factories that were organised. We contacted the union organising each factory, and arranged to interview the shopstewards. By November 1986, we had managed to interview 36 shopstewards.

The average shopsteward interviewed was an African man in a COSATU-affiliated union. He was 37 years old and had completed Standard 7 at school. He started work in 1970, had joined the union by 1981, and was a semi-skilled worker earning an average of R569 per month. He had a family of 6 dependants to support and he rented accommodation in a township which his family sometimes shared. At the same time, he had strong links with the countryside, with family and dependants living in a rural area of Kwazulu.

The shopstewards were therefore not an entirely urban labour force. The majority had substantial families and dependants in the countryside. Because they were not permanent residents there, they did not have great material interests in the Durban townships.



Inkatha supporters chasing mourners at the funeral of victims of an attack on the memorial service for Victoria Mxenge

charged and dispersed a crowd of about 2,500 that had tried to attack the shopping complex.

In Inanda, an informal settlement where African and Indian families had for years lived side by side, the situation took a racial turn. Gangs of youth threatened Indian shopkeepers and residents with stoning and burning of properties. Indian families fled in fear of their lives as the protest turned into a racial conflict. Many were protected by African neighbours.

By the second evening townships were in a state of fear and uncertainty with workers not knowing what to do. Youth were demanding money, and petrol. They also demanded that workers join them.

Chaos reigned

On the third day things became chaotic. Youth and progressive organisation lost control of events. The turning point came at the memorial service for Victoria Mxenge. The approximately 4,500 people attending the service were attacked by an impi of about 300 men, identified as Inkatha supporters from Lindelani. Seventeen people were killed and many were injured. The mourners, including shopsteward leaders fled for their lives.

On the fourth day chaos reigned in most areas. Shops belonging mainly to Inkatha councillors were under attack in most townships.

Looting and burning continued

in Inanda and unemployed youth and adults looted shops and homes that had been evacuated. The media's coverage of events fanned racial tensions, and Indian vigilantes in the Duffs Road and Phoenix areas began to organise defence against expected attack.

Amabutho gain control

Inkatha supporters began to mobilise members and all able-bodied men to defend the shops and to attack and scatter youth. Those who refused to join the Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* were accused of being UDF and were assaulted. Some joined the *amabutho* willingly but others joined for fear of their lives.

By the fifth day Inkatha-supporting *amabutho* were in control of Umlazi. The rampage in Inanda continued and the Phoenix settlement came under attack and buildings were burnt down.

Progressive community organisations and the UDF attempted to intervene but it was clear that Inkatha supporters, through their use of physical force, continued to hold the townships.

Shopstewards met to decide what to do. They felt they could not be "bullied" by either youth or Inkatha supporters. They wanted to meet youth and to call a mass meeting. Some wanted to call Buthelezi to a meeting to make him answer for what was happening in the town-

ships. But they soon sensed the mood of the workers, many of whom saw Inkatha as a peace-keeping force who had acted in a positive way.

The situation was complex. Shopstewards had to negotiate with union members who also had decided loyalties to Inkatha.

Tension in the factories

From our interviews the picture that emerges is that workers were afraid to go home, were arriving late at work, were discussing events taking place in the townships and were becoming embroiled in arguments on the rights and wrongs of the organisations acting in the township. Shopstewards found that they had to intervene in conflicts that were emerging in the factory with workers on both sides becoming heated over the issues.

At least a third of the shopstewards interviewed said that at the factories workers were not at work or were late in coming to work as a result of the disturbances in the townships.

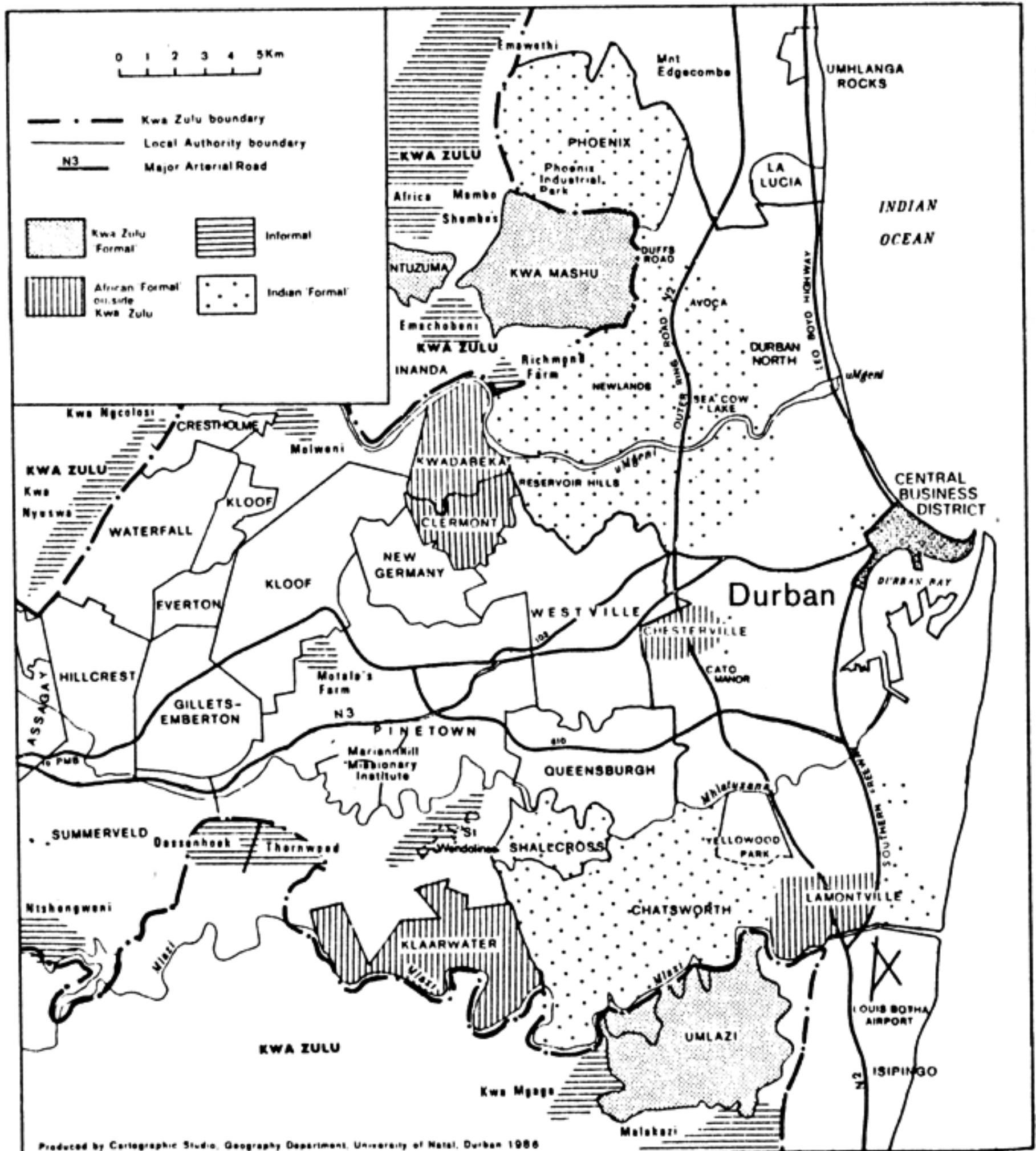
There was much heated discussion and debate in the factories among workers. In 11 (52%) of the factories, unity among workers was threatened as result of township conflicts. Workers who supported Inkatha clashed in argument with those who supported FOSATU or UDF. Older workers blamed the youth for the unrest and quarrelled

with younger workers who tried to explain their views on the situation. In some factories workers blamed UDF for the violence in townships, and in one of these shopstewards saw this as a result of the way in which the media had handled the In-

anda uprisings.

The shopstewards' own view of the situation reflects their militant consciousness which is far ahead of the consciousness of the workers they represent.

In the words of the shopste-



Durban metropolitan region

Taken from 'An appetite for power' Mare/Hamilton

wards, in the factory:

* "People had divided viewpoints about the situation. Some were supporting the struggle and complaining about the formation of the *amabutho*. Others were saying the *amabutho* should be there to protect the damage to others' property. They also remarked that no liberation could be achieved by killing and burning one another. Some people blamed the UDF as a bad organisation instigating violence."

Shopstewards responded to the tensions in the factories by calling meetings, discussing events and presenting their interpretation of events to workers. One shopsteward explained: "Inkatha members were told they must become *amabutho* because this is an old Zulu custom. That people when grown up must become part of an *amabutho* without being told what they would be asked to do. We explained what the *amabutho* really was. We attacked the chief. Some were irritated with us, but with the help of the workers from the floor who are also part of youth organisations in the township we were able to change people's views about Inkatha." Shopstewards had to fight against traditional beliefs, the ideas propagated by the media and the statements made by Buthelezi.

As another shopsteward said, "keeping unity is a continuous issue. It is hard to get workers to see things as a united force. We tried to

cool the workers who were Inkatha and who said they wanted to see UDF and kill them because they want to make the situation ungovernable. We said to them we should unite as workers against other classes. We discussed what was happening and tried to convince workers not to take part in these things that were happening in the townships."

While shopstewards, as recognised leaders and representatives of workers, were able to find ways to restore unity in the factories, they had little control over events in the townships, Inkatha had gained control.

Clashes in the townships

The shopstewards described what happened in the areas where they lived. Workers from Kwa Mashu and parts of Umlazi were unable to go to work as youths set up barricades in the townships. In the areas where the shopstewards lived in Umlazi shops were burnt, and Inkatha *amabutho* fought with "guns and bombs". Shopstewards from Umlazi said that people were forced to join the vigilantes. Some in the township blamed the UDF for the trouble in the townships.

In Clermont there was conflict in some sections as shops were burnt and "UDF was torn apart as some blamed the Xhosas for all the unrest, and as youth and hostel-dwellers clashed. Ethnic identity

was strong." Local organisation was able to make some impact, though, as youth and workers met to discuss the situation. Organisations came together to "address community issues. We looked at ourselves as workers and community." In some sections things were quiet "as most residents were COSATU or UDF."

In Lamontville children were on boycott and buses and offices were burnt. Workers feared stayaways and blamed the government for the troubles as there was no money, no houses and no jobs. All communities lived in fear.

The shopstewards saw the immediate cause of the outbreak as being the death of Victoria Mxenge. Underlying causes were seen to be the political climate, awareness of oppression, no jobs, unemployment, communities wanting equal rights, children wanting equal education. The ethnic and racial turn of events was seen as a result of discrimination in this country and the way people are taught to look at each other. The unrest was seen as the result of a lack of proper organisation, and as a result of grassroots being unorganised. Some saw the conflict as being between two organisations who were vying for support and wanting control over "who would be the boss of tomorrow."

In the shopstewards' view the aggressors in the community battles were Inkatha supporters and the *amabutho*, aided by the police and army. They identified traders, coun-

cillors and shacklords as the force supporting the *amabutho*, and working closely with the SADF.

Shopkeepers guarded their shops against being burnt. They organised and financially supported the *amabutho*.

Unemployed youth were seen as supporting the struggle and playing a vital role together with students who were seen as the vanguard of the struggle. but some unemployed youth demanded money at Umlazi roadblocks, and others were recruited into the ranks of the *amabutho* at R4.00 a day. Students tried to control the situation and to link up with workers but were not organised well enough.

The shopstewards saw the police and army as worsening the situation through their conduct. An alliance between the *amabutho* and police was seen to exist in all the townships. Inkatha supporters were seen to be working with the SADF in attacking innocent people, and to be causing ethnic hostility. Inkatha supporters conducted house to house raids in Umlazi to search out UDF activists, while the SADF conducted house to house searches in Lamontville.

Inkatha supporters were seen as "attacking the comrades and setting the struggle back".

UDF was seen as "fighting for our rights, enlightening the community through pamphlets, and tried to change the situation". But UDF was unable to come out with

strong action and was seen as not having "good structures".

Generally workers and the community around them were afraid. Shopstewards felt powerless and feared for their lives. As one shopsteward said: "If you took direct

"I was forced to join the vigilantes. They went around beating people up after 8p.m. They came with a list and collected everyone after work. They held a roll call. If someone was not present they would go to him the next day and



Amabutho on the move - KwaMashu

Photo: Billy Paddock

action, Inkatha supporters would kill you, so we kept quiet.' Another said "things were bad and I and my family could do nothing. I was afraid because my neighbours are Inkatha members."

Three COSATU shopstewards, one from Kwa Mashu, and two from Umlazi, were forced to join the *amabutho* in attacks on youth and suspected UDF activists. They said:

ask which meeting he attended. It was safer to tag along with them. They threatened to burn your house or shoot you if you did not join. Because of late nights I was getting late for work."

"I was armed and attacked youth against my will. I stay in the hostel. I was aware we were being misled but I could not voice this out for fear of my life."

"*Amabutho* forced me to go with them to Phoenix."

Some workers joined the *amabutho* willingly. Others were forced to join while others went into hiding to avoid being recruited. As individuals and community members only four shop stewards (11%) attempted to take some initiative in the section where they lived.

One shop steward, a member of a youth organisation in Umlazi spoke to five *amabutho* who lived in this section. "I knew them as neighbours. They listened. They told me they were not working and were doing this to get money. But they did not get paid. They stopped being *amabutho*."

A shop steward from Kwa Mashu who was also president of a savings club called members of the club and their families together to explain the situation and urge them not to join the *amabutho*.

A third shop steward, living in Umlazi, "calmed down people who were seeing each other as enemies."

A fourth shop steward in Umlazi contacted all workers living near him and "discussed issues affecting us at work and what is happening in the townships. We decided we should talk to workers not to get used by others. Shop stewards decided they would participate in an area where they were staying."

Shop stewards helpless in the community

Shop stewards decided that the time had come for them to act in the community. They attempted to intervene where they could. But their previous lack of participation in community politics limited them.

As representatives of workers the shop stewards found they were unable to act because they "were not organised into structures" to respond to community issues. One shop steward said, "We don't meet as shop stewards in the township. I believe the time has come where we should meet." Another said, "we did nothing because it was not clear as to what to do. We need more education. Twenty-nine of the shop stewards interviewed did nothing."

The majority of the shop stewards were only able to influence the conflict inside the factory. Three shop stewards in Clermont and four in Umlazi attempted to act through linking up with local progressive community organisations. They attempted to reach the community for as they said, "*Amabutho* are members of unions and also workers." But this was a battle lost, for neither progressive community organisations nor trade unions were sufficiently in touch with township politics at grassroots to make an impact.

It was clear that traditional beliefs were strong or could easily be

roused among workers and township residents. Identification with traditional authority was one of the factors that caused conflict on the factory floor and that led to some workers willingly taking up arms as *amabutho*. The shopstewards opposed these ideas and actions but they had not given much thought as to how to resist them. Past union practice had been to avoid these issues. But it was impossible to avoid them any longer.

The crisis the shopstewards found themselves facing was therefore not only an inability to influence events outside the factories, but also an inability to exercise their authority over their own polarised membership inside the factories during August and September 1985. It has been an ongoing struggle since then to unite the membership again.

2. Battles between Zulu and Pondo

In December 1985, while factories and communities tried to recover from the violent conflict of August, new battles broke out on the Natal South Coast, once again having implications for progressive organisation. These battles pitched Zulu-speaking residents against Pondo-speaking residents on the South Coast, who were in the Southern-most industrial area of Durban.

It is clear that these battles took place against the background of homelessness, increasing unemployment and deprivation in the area. Many Pondo workers had migrated there to seek work and had brought their families to live with them some years before. This was facilitated by shacklords who allowed their brothers from Ixopo, Polela, Harding and so on, to settle.

The interpretation given by Zulu chiefs and residents in the area was that Zulu workers did not have jobs or homes because the Pondo had come to poach what rightfully belonged to the Zulu. It took an argument one morning at the only communal tap at Umbogintwini for the simmering discontent to flare up into an 'ethnic' riot between Pondo and Zulu.

The conflict between the Pondo and Zulu on the Natal South Coast made its impact on the lives of workers in their factories and communities. All thirty African shopstewards had been affected by this conflict.

Ten had experienced conflict in the factories where they worked; fifteen know of other factories where conflict had been experienced; seven experienced this conflict in the areas where they lived. Unity in strongly unionised factories was threatened as Zulu workers reacted to the conflict, and in some instances approached management asking that Pondo workers be dismissed.

This was a burning issue for the

majority of Durban's workers. By contrast, the five Indian and Coloured shopstewards who worked in garment and leather factories where there were very few or no African workers, had not even heard of this conflict.

"Apartheid causes this"

From the interviews it was clear that there had been much discussion about the conflict. There were many stories of how the conflict had begun. The common threads that ran through the varied responses were that Pondo had come into the area, there was much unemployment and a shortage of housing, a fight at a tap broke out into conflict with Zulus on one side and Pondos on the other.

"I don't know why this happened", said one shopsteward, "They were staying together for ages."

Another shopsteward said, "Apartheid causes this because there is a looking down on each other and intolerance because one is Pondo and one is Zulu."

Another said, "There were differences in organisations. Zulus are Inkatha. Pondos have their own organisation. Zulus resent Pondos and think they should not be allowed to build houses."

One shopsteward who was also Inkatha chairman in the area where he lived said, "It was just like 1949. It started quick and it spread quick.

One Zulu was killed, then one Pondo was killed and it spread like fire."

Conflict in the factories

Of the ten shopstewards who had experienced difficulties in the factories where they worked, eight were COSATU and two were SAAWU.

Although workers at these factories were organised in one union and were at most times united, relationships became threatened as a result of the South Coast disturbances. "Zulu workers agitated that Pondo workers be attacked or dismissed."

Pondo workers were given leave until the disturbances subsided in two of these factories. In one factory organised by a COSATU affiliate many Pondo workers resigned because they were threatened with death by Zulu workers. "Zulus were victimising Pondos in the factory, saying that they were killing their brothers on the South Coast."

Shopstewards in troubled factories called meetings and addressed workers in an attempt to put a stop to "disuniting actions".

In one factory where unity was not threatened within the factory workers talked of how "we killed AmaPondo in the community". The senior shopsteward for this factory realised that they still had a "big job to do". The workers leadership at

this factory put out and distributed among the workforce a pamphlet on worker unity.

In two other factories where unity was not directly threatened shopstewards "consciously tried to stop referring to each other as Zulu and Pondo" and ensured that unity was maintained by talking to workers.

Fifteen shopstewards interviewed had heard of other factories where unity had been affected by these disturbances. These included factories near Umbogintwini and in Prospecton. According to the shopstewards interviewed, Zulu workers had threatened to stop working in two factories until the Pondo workers were dismissed. In another factory "the ex-president of Chemical Workers Industrial Union, who had worked more than seventeen years at the factory, was forced to take leave when workers began fighting among themselves". At other factories also Pondo workers were given leave.

Shopstewards' action

In most cases shopstewards attempted to restore unity through meetings. In one case the shopstewards issued a pamphlet calling for unity and an end to the fighting. One shopsteward saw their task as "Organising workers and making it clear to them about race and struggle in and out of the factory".

Another said: "There were big

problems. Some took sides with either group. There is a lack of thorough training of shopstewards who still have a nationalist approach and lack experience."

A minority (three), thought that the situation was beyond our power as shopstewards, we can't do anything outside the factory".

3. Trade unions and politics

COSATU is launched.

The situation in Natal was volatile. Durban's shopstewards had no time for reorganisation or respite. Even before any stock could properly be taken of the August/September experience COSATU was launched November in Durban with an aggressive political profile. The launch sparked off reaction from both the state and Kwa Zulu government. This had implications for worker leadership because "when Botha and Buthelezi criticised the launch, workers became suspicious and panicked". Despite the support for the creation of this working class giant there was no consensus about the high political profile it had adopted.

All the COSATU shopstewards interviewed attended the conference and launch. Workers they represented were jubilant at the



COSATU launch - a giant is born

Photo: Afrapix

launch because they would now be stronger as part of a militant and progressive federation. "They were happy saying it will build worker power and make workers' voice powerful". But at the same time some workers and shopstewards were somewhat concerned with the newly elected president Elijah Barayi's speech which attacked homeland leaders. This created some controversy with some workers saying that COSATU should not be political and with some being concerned at the attack on Chief Buthelezi.

"Workers were confused, especially Inkatha members who claimed that COSATU wants to use workers in political issues."

"Workers were hesitant after the COSATU launch and wanted to resign. We held meetings to explain what the federation is all about. The issue of disinvestment has raised difficulties. Some of our members are Inkatha members as well so they were being influenced that COSATU is preaching the gospel of disinvestment. When I tried to explain the issue of disinvestment to them they labelled me as a UDF or ANC affiliate. As a person who always attends union seminars I gradually explained to the workers the history of the working class in South Africa and they started to understand.

From the townships where the shopstewards lived the overall feel-

ing was a divided one. Some said that COSATU would bring big changes for the country and would help to unit workers, while others who were Inkatha supporters saw COSATU as linked to the ANC and as anti-Inkatha. "Some criticised COSATU by saying that COSATU wants to put them in jail because it is related to the ANC. Others say COSATU leads to liberation." "Some compared Inkatha and COSATU, saying COSATU is pro-disinvestment and Inkatha against sanctions and disinvestment."

The COSATU shopstewards identified with COSATU strongly, yet they were worried about the im-

plications that any confrontation with Inkatha would bring about.

The conflict in the townships heightened as COSATU leadership came under attack from Inkatha supporters. These attacks took the form of attacks on persons as well as the burning down of homes. The attack on COSATU leadership continued, becoming most heightened in the Natal Midlands, and in Northern Natal through 1986 and continuing into 1987 and the present. Worker leaders lived in fear of their lives, some being forced to flee their homes as a result of threats from Inkatha supporters.



Uwusa launch - an attack on Cosatu

Photo: Billy Paddock

Inkatha launches UWUSA

In April 1986 Inkatha publicly announced that it was to launch a trade union - UWUSA - on 1 May 1986.

The choice of 1 May as the day of the launch was clearly not a coincidence. This was 'workers' day' which COSATU affiliates had begun observing two years previously, and which was being negotiated with employers as a paid holiday. COSATU had planned a rally for this day and many workers had negotiated time off to attend the rally. Inkatha was clearly attempting to take over this day and wanting to show up COSATU in a test of strength over which of the two rallies would get greater support.

Inkatha used its authority, the media and massive laying on of transport to mobilise for the UWUSA rally. King Goodwill Zwelithini in a radio message urged all Zulu people to support UWUSA's May Day launch. Local chiefs followed up this broadcast with frequent messages advertising the rally.

Mobilising in rural areas took the form of headmen, and in one area homeland police, urging people to go to the rally. Kwa Zulu MPs and community councillors held meetings in their constituencies to mobilise for the launch.

The UWUSA launch was organised around an attack on

COSATU's disinvestment policy and around slogans of "Jobs not Hunger". The message put across by Inkatha and Kwa Zulu officials was that COSATU was asking people from overseas to take away their money and that this would cause loss of jobs and hunger.

Pamphlets advertising the launch attacked "unknown Xhosas and an Indian" who were in control of COSATU. One pamphlet stated that were Mandela not in jail he would be at the UWUSA rally.

The UWUSA rally was attended by about 60 000 people from all over Natal and some from the Transvaal. At one point in the rally a coffin with the words "Barayi and Naidoo are dead" and "COSATU is dead", were brought into the stadium and a mock funeral was held.

Inkatha's support among Natal's people and among significant numbers of Natal's workers could not be underestimated. But it was yet to be seen if Inkatha could successfully take on COSATU in the factories through its newborn union.

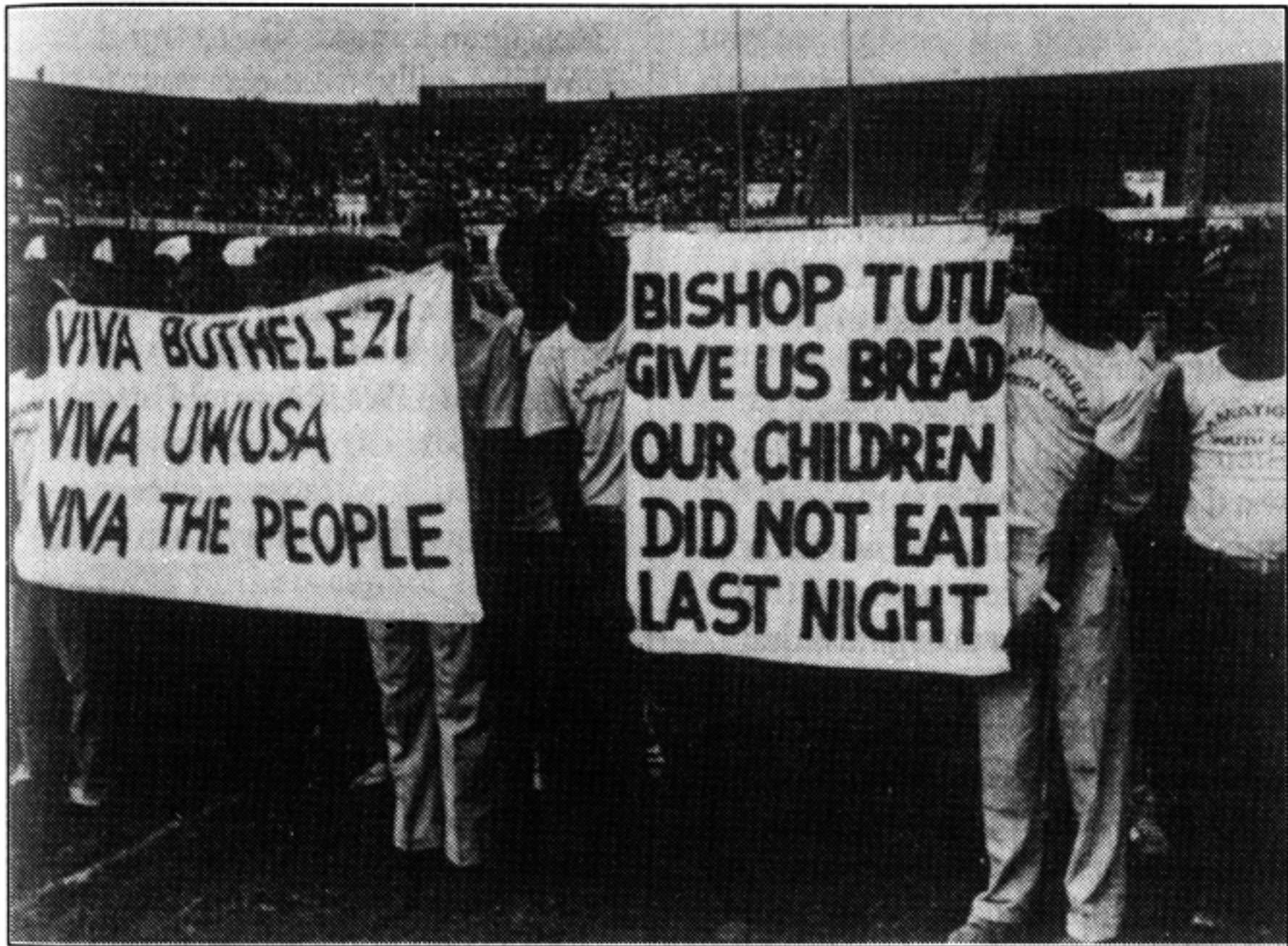
COSATU affiliates had been campaigning for May Day as paid holiday since 1984. Planning for the 1986 May Day rallies to be held in Durban, Hammarsdale, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith and Newcastle were undertaken by a planning committee set up by COSATU Regional Committee which also set up a liaison committee for May Day with the UDF. The UWUSA publicity led to some confusion and in many

instances unions had to clarify the issues of disinvestment and the UWUSA rally. Most unions held meetings to discuss the day and to mobilise workers attendance at the rally. There was no conflict in the factories over the two rallies.

However, in the townships at-

and his home burnt.

The UDF, NIC and UCC attempted to mobilise for the COSATU rallies through pamphlets and house visits. There was considerable tension in the weeks before the rallies as communities speculated about possible violence



UWUSA launch - attacking sanctions

Photo: Billy Paddock

tacks on individual unionists continued. On 26 April Thami Mohlami, COSATU regional secretary was shot at and his home was petrol bombed. An Inkatha youth member was arrested in connection with this attack. In Northern Natal MAWU Vice-President and Alusaf shopsteward, Vilane, was shot at

on the day.

For all this, the COSATU rallies were very well attended by an estimated 28 000 people of which 9000 were youth from the local communities. COSATU and UDF speakers addressed the rallies. There was one recorded violent incident after the Durban COSATU

rally at Curries Fountain, when an Umlazi youth was shot dead on Berea station. A local community councillor was arrested for the murder.

The Labour Monitoring Group (LMG), recorded the highest industrial stayaway the region had seen up to then.

Shopsteward's views on COSATU rally

All the COSATU shopstewards interviewed went to the COSATU May Day rally as did many of the workers they represented.

COSATU members were loyal to their federation, for as one shopsteward said, "COSATU is the only organisation fighting for workers rights. Most workers believed that COSATU is the real organisation which represents workers."

The shopstewards knew of some who had gone to the UWUSA rally to hear UWUSA's aims, to listen to their leader, because jobs were being offered, or because they were rounded up from hostels, townships or rural areas and forced to. In one factory which is known as a particularly strong and militant factory shopstewards went to the rally after being threatened by Inkatha supporters. "Some workers told their councillors that we shopstewards were forcing them to go to the COSATU rally and not to Kings Park. So as a trick some (shopstewards) decided to go to Kings

Park." Shopstewards from this factory were under threat of attack and were living away from their homes to stay alive.

At one hostel, "The councillor called a meeting before the UWUSA launch. He asked the people questions such as 'Do you want to starve?' So the people said, 'No'. Then he said, 'Go to the UWUSA rally to express your feelings.'"

There were some, a minority, who went to neither rally, "because there were some rumours of the fight between the two. They feared for their lives because there were rumours that UWUSA would attack COSATU."

Shopsteward's views on UDF

For the first time in Natal there was active co-operation between the UDF and trade unions in organising and sharing a platform at the rally.

Most shopstewards interviewed were pleased at the participation of UDF in planning the May Day rally with COSATU. They saw such co-operation as strengthening their fight as workers.

* "I was glad of that because it showed me that they are both progressive and for workers."

* "It was good that workers and politicians were on the same platform fighting against capitalists. One cannot separate politics from the economy. It is a step forward."

* "Joint activities linked youth

and workers together, and encouraged youth-parent relationship."

* "It was becoming clear that a worker is still a worker in the township."

* "I was happy because both fight for workers rights and both are being smashed by Inkatha."

Only two COSATU shopstewards interviewed were unhappy at UDF's participation in the organisation of the rally. One of these said "Our policy is not to affiliate to any political organisation. This will make our task difficult."

The other said, "I don't think a worker movement should be deeply involved in a political movement. As workers we can participate in some issues in the community, but not as a workers' movement. Some issues like rents workers cannot avoid. But we must draw lessons from the past, from older unions like SACTU. By deep political involvement factory issues get left behind and too much time (is spent) over political issues."

Two other COSATU shopstewards thought the UDF participation was good but were somewhat wary that some others were not happy as they felt COSATU would fall under UDF control and become the frontline of the ANC. As one said:

"For me it was good but others thought COSATU would fall under the control of the UDF. Others believe UDF is political and they want an organisation solely for workers."

Most of the shopstewards said

that the UDF has support. This was seen as being mainly among youth and because the UDF took up struggles for genuine change.

* "Most of the children support UDF. The children today know what they want. And the want change."

* "They have support because they are fighting the people's struggle. They are on the side of the people."

* "They are opposed to the system that oppressed us".

The shopstewards saw UDF as not having organisational structures, but saw this as a result of harassment by the State and Inkatha.

Shopsteward's views on UWUSA

Most shopstewards viewed the formation of UWUSA as a deliberate attempt to divide and disrupt COSATU and weaken workers organisation. The emphasis on Zulu organisation went against union principles.

The vast majority of COSATU shopstewards said that workers they represented were unhappy at the formation of UWUSA. They saw UWUSA as dividing COSATU, as 'a bosses' union', an '*amabutho* federation', 'supportive of free enterprise and not for workers.' Shopstewards said of workers' responses to UWUSA,

* "They said it is not a workers' federation, it came to oppress them."

* It was seen as disorganising the organised."

* "Inkatha just wanted to do away with COSATU."

* "Workers did not like UWUSA. They said UWUSA was formed by management and members were puppets for management."

* "Workers say UWUSA is not progressive. It is not for workers. It is a federation of *amabutho*. It came to destroy workers."

* "Some said that Buthelezi 'has failed to do his job, now he's jumping to labour'. They said they never saw a government organising unions."

* "They said, 'Inkatha and its union is out to blind them, while COSATU is busy enlightening them.'"

Four COSATU shopstewards said that workers were confused and unsure how to respond to UWUSA. Two others said that workers were not disturbed as UWUSA has no members.

At the time of interviewing, (September - November 1986) all COSATU shopstewards knew of attempts made by UWUSA to organise in factories around Durban, Newcastle, Vryheid, Hlobane, Kwa Zulu. The shopstewards said that UWUSA had gone about organising through getting access from management, through support from Inkatha members inside factories, by using threats and the support of vigilantes, by using ethnicity and slurs against COSATU for having

an Indian leading, by promising jobs and through extensive use of the media.

"They are helped by a supporter of Inkatha inside the factory. If workers refuse he fills in the form himself and gives it to management. In Hlobane vigilantes came and asked all those who did not support a Zulu union, and fighting broke out."

Only three of the shopstewards interviewed had themselves been subject to threats of violence. One had to leave home for three months, another received threatening phone calls and the third was present during an attack on COSATU members by an UWUSA impi. Others had heard of UWUSA attempts to get workers to join through use of force. Shopstewards had heard of the conflicts between Inkatha and COSATU unions in the Northern Natal areas. "It proved that Inkatha is not all for peace."

None of the COSATU shopstewards thought that UWUSA would win workers support. This was because UWUSA did not "not organise like we do, they have no experience of organisation, they are not worker controlled, and they work with the bosses and (KwaZulu) government."

* "Workers see that no leader who is a capitalist can lead the working class. They are not using strategies workers are used to in recruiting members."

* "Workers have been long in

their unions. They know of the struggles they fought. Most UWUSA leadership has no factory floor experience so no one would ditch their own union for such."

COSATU unions and membership were seen as being critical of UWUSA generally.

"Because UWUSA is not worker controlled. Rather management controlled."

* "There is no strong reason why workers have to run away from COSATU to join a new federation."

* "They are unhappy because UWUSA is formed to divide workers into their ethnic groups. UWUSA is perpetuating the idea that COSATU is for Ponds and Indians. So because Inkatha knows that Natal is predominantly Zulu it tries to win over all the Zulus so that COSATU would flop."

Interestingly, even the two shopstewards who were Inkatha members in their townships were not supportive of UWUSA, being jealous protectors of their trade unions at work.

"To tell you the truth there's no other union that has benefits like the one I have so I can never allow them (UWUSA) to come. My union disagrees with UWUSA. They say it was formed under a political wing."

Thus although Inkatha had resonance among workers and in the townships in general, this far from guaranteed support for a trade union set up by Inkatha. Only three shopstewards thought that UWUSA

would pose a serious threat to workers unity. However, shopstewards were aware of the disorganising potential of UWUSA, particularly through its Inkatha link, and they took this into account in talking about the way forward.

Shopstewards views on Inkatha

Some of the shopstewards interviewed thought that Inkatha had considerable support. This was seen to be the result of Zulu identification, loyalty to chiefs, the influence of councillors, and in some cases through coercion. The majority, however, said Inkatha had no support because it had failed to show results and had been discredited through the violence perpetrated by Inkatha supporters.

* "It is seen that they can't keep promises. The community is not openly criticising it but they are against it."

* "Some people are loyal to their chiefs."

Inkatha was seen as having lost support in recent years:

* "Since 1976 I don't think they have much support. They were well organised before, but are less well organised at present."

* "People saw during the August troubles that Inkatha supporters were killing (people) and it is not clear to them."

In Lamontville people did not support Inkatha "as they predomi-

nantly support UDF."

* "Inkatha only divides the community."

But as one shopsteward said, even though there are "not many supporters of Buthelezi, some respect him as chief. They see the mistakes of Inkatha but the chief still has the people's support. Workers say he is good because he has not accepted independence." In one factory of about 1000 workers the shopsteward said that there were about ten workers who supported Inkatha. He then qualified this by saying, "They support Mtwana rather than Inkatha. He is the chief."

The way forward

The majority view amongst shopstewards was that they and their trade unions should educate the memberships better and that they should initiate more involvement in township issues. In the first case, they felt that workers, through discussion and seminars, should strive for a clearer awareness of the political life around them. In the latter case, there was an argument that, "unions should extend their work to political matters and should not be confined to the work situation only."

They could not leave community issues unattended because conflict outside the factories was affecting relations and dividing memberships inside e.g., Pondo versus Zulu conflicts, Indian versus African

conflicts and so on. One of the shopstewards stated that, "We need strong organisation among ourselves. Our mistake was not getting involved in the community. We said our struggle was in the factory only. At that time it was right. But now we need to become stronger in the community."

Most of them insisted that trade unions could still achieve a lot despite the political climate of the time. "They are the only organisation" argued a shopsteward, "that educates workers on democracy and participation... Trade unions, go beyond tribal links and emphasise non-racialism."

The majority also felt that the UDF was unable to initiate any crucial campaign or action in Durban because it was under direct attack from the government and from Inkatha. But despite such limitations some shopstewards insisted that whatever the cost, closer links needed to be forged between the unions and the UDF. Finally, half of the shopstewards pinned their hopes on Nelson Mandela's release and leadership, as the only possible resolution of conflict in Natal. Twelve of them, that is a third of those interviewed, were fatalistic; no-one or no organisation could resolve the conflict in Natal in the foreseeable future. They could only see violence, conflict and a protracted struggle ahead of them.

Postscript 1988

Sixteen months after these interviews, six shopstewards were approached again for a retrospective review. All were in agreement that 1987 was a year of extreme hardships and unforeseen difficulties. From their accounts five issues crystallised as central and need further comment:

1. UWUSA's failure

UWUSA's attempts to roll back COSATU failed. Yet it remained an "irritation" in many factories as many decisions on shopfloor issues were vigorously resisted by UWUSA members. Nevertheless, in all the factories they knew about from their Branch Executive Committees, UWUSA failed to attract more than a handful of supporters.

2. Involvement in the community

Community involvement increased at three basic levels:

* Most shopstewards got involved in their individual capacity, as community residents. They involved themselves in township issues and especially in Umlazi, Lamontville, Newtown and Clermont, they managed to build strong relationships with youth groups. This

often misled residents to think that the entire organised strength of the unions was behind them; or that COSATU members were becoming more active, which was not entirely a true reflection of the situation.

* Some of them developed a more structured relationship, primarily through one shopsteward council. Through this a better relationship between youth groups, residents and shopstewards was beginning to emerge.

* They were all aware that COSATU had nationally a more direct relationship with Congress-aligned organisations. But none of them were personally involved in meetings as regards this alliance at leadership levels.

Finally, most of the shopsteward's families in the broader study, and all of the ones interviewed in 1988, resided in the Natal/Kwa Zulu countryside. Whereas their physical communities were in the urban areas, their real homes were further afield in areas which were impervious to trade union organisation and ruled by headmen and chiefs. For them community involvement also meant involvement in their homestead areas. All agreed that they had no lever through which to challenge rural corruption and poverty. And due to the escalation of conflict between COSATU and Inkatha, all down-played their trade union involvement when they were in the countryside.

3. Different political lines

This community involvement, together with the more political direction COSATU was initiating, created tensions and in some instances conflict within unions over political "lines" and methods of struggle. Most tension was emanating from two issues; the adoption of the Freedom Charter by unions and COSATU, and methods of action over political issues. In the former case, all felt that officials were to blame for the tensions as workers were more or less in agreement.

Yet the shopstewards themselves were in sharp disagreement. Two of them argued that the Freedom Charter should be adopted the "MAWU way", as a minimum demand. At the same time a more socialist perspective should be developed. One shopsteward strongly objected to "all this talk of socialism" - he called it a foreign ideology and he saw it as an obstacle to freedom. For him the Charter was a question of principle; it was not an issue to be made into a minimum demand.

One shopsteward attacked Charterists for being pro-capitalist. Two shopstewards were worried that COSATU's political stance confirmed all of chief Buthelezi's insinuations about COSATU being an ANC front. They wanted a more neutral role for unions, leaving membership free to participate in any political camp they chose to.

Much disagreement arose also from the methods of action that COSATU affiliates were adopting. The disagreement was between shopstewards, but also between them and their memberships. All of them agreed that direct action, whether in the workplace or in the community could publicise and demonstrate protests and disaffection. But they were divided over which were the best forms of action, some favouring shopfloor campaigns - sleep-ins, go-slow, stoppages, demonstrations and so on - others favouring stayaways.

All agreed that there had been too many calls for such actions and they felt they were not able to "pull them through". They were sceptical about whether their membership were able to sustain direct forms of action indefinitely. All of them were also worried about the continuing readiness of youth groups in the townships to call on them for major confrontation. Most stoppages in 1987, though, were about working conditions and wage disputes, even in these workers were beginning to get "action-shy".

4. Problems in union structures

1987 was for most of them a frustrating experience for a further three related reasons:

* They had no access to information save through rumours in the township, on the shopfloor and

through office-bearers reports. This made them rather cautious.

* Save factory-floor meetings, all other meetings they attended throughout 1987 within COSATU structures were ill-attended.

* Most of the time despite decisions taken at meetings, workers would act in different ways or not act at all, which undermined their ability to guarantee mass support for campaigns: "They would agree or endorse a decision at a meeting but they would go and not implement it". All of them stressed that despite such "slackness" all the structures survived.

5. What is unity?

They all agreed that the task ahead would be to build "unity" on factory floors, between factory floors, within unions, at local level, within COSATU and so on. But such unity at this stage means different things to them.

For two unity means unity with the national democratic movement. For two it meant unity of all wor-

kers despite political affiliation, that is worker unity first and alliances later. The other two were vaguely hinting at a unity over common principles of practice, e.g. with all those who organise on a democratic basis. Yet without unity, they all argued, neither the State's onslaught, nor the managerial counter-offensive could be stopped.

In short, in the words of one shopstewards:

"Workers have advanced themselves on the factory floor. Workers have been finally recognised as important by communities - workers are not just 'rubbishes' or 'nothings', people sing about them. Most of my brothers understand how they are exploited, and why they are pushed around as blacks. To get here we have achieved a lot. But we sloganise about "amandla" ... we don't have it yet. We don't have the power, or the magic ability, the **muti**, to change things yet ... We know that too, and that is also an advance. As the bible says we are in the wilderness, but we know we are going to places like Canaan"...

Thank you

This article was written while the authors were members of the Workers' Resistance in Natal Project, based at the University of Natal. The authors would like to thank the other members of the Project - Rob Lambert and Zim Nondumo - as well as those who assisted with the interviewing, for their help.

Dismissed workers take dispute to giant new shop stewards' council

A dispute over unfair dismissal of four workers at Star Furnishers results in the dismissal of the entire workforce. Six other Afcol plants come out on a legal solidarity strike, and shop stewards take the issue to the first meeting of the giant new S.A. Breweries Shop Steward Council. SAB are the owners of Afcol. Report by KARL VON HOLDT.

The floor of Khotso House shakes as several hundred dancing workers chant freedom songs. Faces of young workers, old workers, men and women are lit up with energy. Warm bodies are crammed together in the small hall. People laugh and sing at the top of their voices, enjoying their collective unity and strength.

"Amandla! Amandla!" The chair calls the meeting to order. The workers are from six Afcol companies in Johannesburg. Three hundred and forty workers from Star Furnishers were dismissed when they

struck in support of four colleagues who, they alleged, were dismissed unfairly. The next day, 21 April, five other Afcol companies came out on strike in solidarity. A seventh Afcol company, in Pietersburg, is also striking.

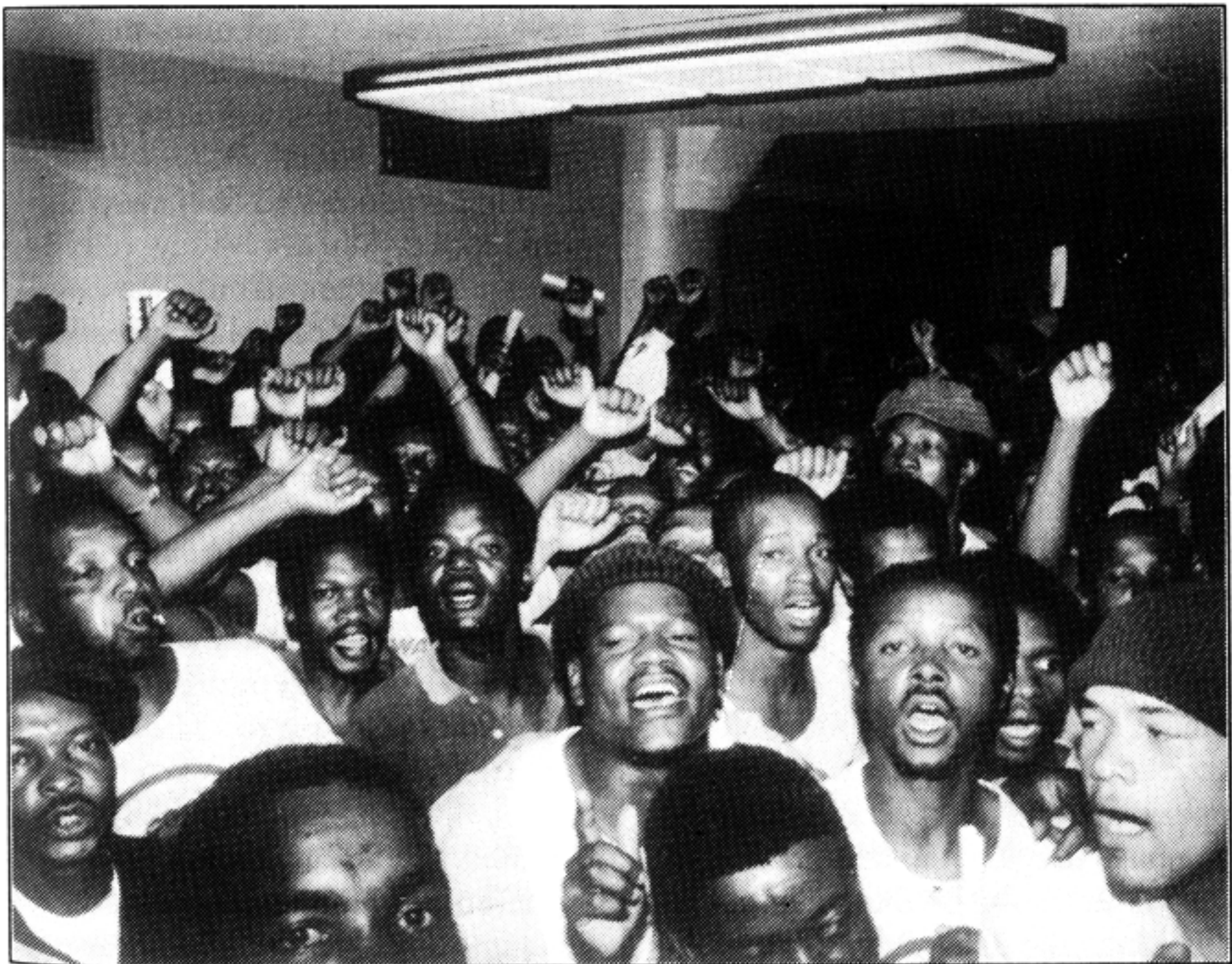
Today, 22 April, workers are meeting to discuss the next step. The meeting opens with an older worker giving a brief history of how the Printing, Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PPWAWU) succeeded in organising Afcol furniture factories. Then national organiser Ernest Masala reports on

the previous day's meeting with Afcol management. Management refused to discuss the dismissals until all plants were back at work, he reports. Moreover, management stated clearly that it "had been patient with the union, but now it was tired of the union and wanted to bring it to a halt. It stated it would use the **iron fist** to do this." Management gave an ultimatum for workers to be back at work at 7 am today, a Friday, but shop stewards persuaded them to extend the deadline till Monday. Shop stewards are due to meet management again today at

2 pm to report the outcome of the general meeting.

Masala explains that the strikers have two choices: to remain on strike, face dismissal, and continue the struggle from outside the factories; or go back and fight from within for the reinstatement of Star workers.

After some discussion the meeting resolves to stay out. As one speaker put it, "If we reverse the decision to support Star the union will be destroyed. They will use the same tactics on the other companies and break the union. We must not



Furniture workers - enjoying the power of collective action

Photo: Tsuks Mokolobate/Learn and Teach

retreat."

Company applies for interdict

At this stage in the proceedings someone came in with a document and handed it to Masala. Masala glanced at it and then stood on a chair to address the meeting. "Afcoll management know you, they know PPWAWU, they have been studying you for some time. They know you are firm. So now they are applying to court for an interdict this afternoon to force you back to work."

Masala then put the views of the union officials to the workers for consideration. "It is clear from management's words and behavior that they want to take this opportunity to smash the union. Management strategy is to invest for the future by dismissing workers today. This would cause them short-term losses now, but they believe that in future they will be able to do what they want. The interdict could also make it more difficult for us. Our opinion, as officials, is that workers should go back to work and fight from within the company, so as to build the union. We should explore every means to resolve the dispute before going on strike. We are putting this opinion to you as workers, because you have to make the decision."

The dilemma provoked great discussion in the hall. Many workers were all for rushing into the strike. As one put it: "This is part of the

Bill. We've been talking and talking about the Bill - now we must show that we reject it."

"You cannot lightly go on strike"

Others however felt it was important to maintain their strength in the factories, and use various other tactics to pressurise management. One worker from Star, an elderly man with few teeth left, argued that the other companies should return to work: "We who are dismissed have got no bread. You cannot lightly go out on strike - you too will have no bread. Try all other methods. We will know you are not abandoning us, you will carry on the fight to get us back."

Then a young and fiery shop steward spoke. "We always say we are strong. Yes we are strong - for one day. But we also complain when we have no money. If we ignore the ultimatum and the interdict we must know it will be a long and bitter fight. You are going to have no money. You are going to suffer. We must be really strong to embark on such a thing, not just say we are strong. We must prepare and plan. We cannot just rush in." These were powerful points. There was a hub-bub as workers turned to their neighbors to discuss them.

Eventually the meeting resolved unanimously to return to work on the following Monday. Before the meeting closed, the chairperson

stressed that the decision did not mean a retreat. It meant that they were using a variety of weapons. They were ready for more action if necessary. They were going back with all their weapons intact.

How the dispute started

The dispute at Star Furnishers started on Thursday 14 April, a week before the strike meeting described above. Shop stewards say there was a worker at the factory who was recruiting for the National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers (NUFAW), a former TUCSA union. NUFAW has a closed shop agreement with the Industrial Council for Furniture and Bedding Manufacturers, and has recently affiliated to the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). At a general meeting at lunchtime that Thursday, workers decided to ask him to clarify his position in front of all the workers.

According to Farouk Jardine, furniture organiser for PPWAWU, a fight broke out between the worker and those sent to call him. Management then convened a disciplinary hearing on Friday 15th, which workers refused to attend on the grounds that shop stewards had been denied the right to investigate the case. The hearing found four workers guilty of assault and dismissed them.

On the following Monday workers refused to work. Shop stewards

met management, who said that they should appeal against the finding if they were unhappy. They did, and the appeal was scheduled for Tuesday 19 April. During this period workers continued the stoppage.

Shop stewards were present at the appeal hearing, and say that no evidence of assault was presented. The following day management announced the result to the shop stewards - "The workers remain dismissed, and there is no reason to overturn the decision. Even if they did not actively take part in the assault they were part of the motivating crowd." The shop stewards reported this to the assembled workers, who were now entering the third day of their work stoppage. At 11.30, while they were reporting back, management issued an ultimatum that workers return to work by 1 pm.

Mass dismissals

Workers refused. However, shop stewards and organisers, believing the situation serious, tried to extract a written undertaking from management that all workers would be allowed back to work, intending that this would also cover the four dismissed workers. A verbal undertaking was given, and workers decided to return to work.

At this stage events became confused. According to Jardine, "We were in the office telexing the union so that we had some record of man-

agement's undertaking. Suddenly management announced over the intercom that all workers had to clock-in before starting to work. This created confusion. Workers came into the office saying there were problems. I went out, and saw security guards everywhere. The guards and supervisors were pushing workers around. I rushed in and phoned one of the managers. He promised to come down. As I put the phone down another manager picked up the intercom and announced that all workers were dismissed.

"The next day workers gathered at the gates, which were manned by security guards and management. Management read out one by one the names of workers who would get a "second chance". They entered the gates as their names were read out. But as soon as they realised how few they were, they came out again."

As soon as they heard what had taken place, workers at the 6 other Afcol companies organised by PPWAWU in the Transvaal came out on solidarity strike. The next day the strikers held the meeting at Khotso House in Johannesburg to decide on their strategy.

The union declares a dispute

After the Khotso House meeting shop stewards met with management. Management agreed to withdraw the interdict application,

since workers had accepted the ultimatum to go back to work, but flatly refused to discuss the Star dismissals. Shop stewards felt that the fact that management only sent two representatives - one from Afcol and one from Star - showed that they were not serious about negotiating. Generally Afcol is represented at negotiations by one manager from each of the seven companies as well as management from Head Office.

After this the union declared a dispute with Afcol. Further meetings continued to deadlock. Workers settled in for the statutory 30 days wait while the Industrial Council tried to resolve the dispute. If that failed, the union could launch a legal strike.

Meanwhile, the Star workers met every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in a hall downstairs from the union offices in Johannesburg. According to shop stewards, "All are coming, they are eager to know what's happening." Workers have organised themselves into four committees concerned with finance, publicity, solidarity and discipline.

The finance committee is responsible for collecting funds from other companies and distributing them to the strikers; the solidarity committee is responsible for contacting other organisations for support; publicity maintains links with the press; and the disciplinary committee sees to it that workers are disciplined, attend meetings and do not just "roam about town".

Workers were also planning a cultural committee to consider various ways of "recording evils in the company, and also in the government".

Shop stewards were trying various ways of increasing pressure on management. CCAWUSA structures had been informed, and

workers had also made direct contact with

CCAUSA members at various shops selling the furniture made at Star. Shop stewards had heard that Star trucks were being turned away from some shops. The Unemployed Workers' Co-ordinating Committee had also been contacted to help organise against scabbing.

Meanwhile, PPWAWU members at other Afcol factories were launching overtime bans. PPWAWU was also making contact with ACTWUSA and NUMSA which are organised in various Afcol owned factories.

Legal strike

The Industrial Council failed to

resolve the dispute, and after holding a strike ballot, PPWAWU launched a legal strike at the six other Afcol plants where it is organised in the Transvaal. The strike started on Monday 30 May, and involved over 1100 workers. By Wednesday Afcol had instituted a lock-out against the striking wor-



"PPWAWU came to our factory...."

kers, and tried to seek an interdict against the union on the grounds that the strike was illegal.

Apart from Star Furnishers, the six companies on strike are Transvaal Mattress, Parker Knoll, Edblo, Highpoint, Powercraft, and Sealy in Pietersberg. Shop stewards say that workers at three other Afcol

plants organised by PPWAWU in Natal and the Western Cape are "ready and waiting to provide solidarity action", but are waiting to see whether the dispute can be resolved in the Transvaal. NUMSA, ACTWUSA and CCAWUSA have also promised to inform and mobilise the support of their members in Afcol owned plants or shops that sell Afcol furniture.

As workers enter the third week

of their strike, management and the union are locked in a protracted trial of strength.

Organising the furniture sector

The Afcol strike raises some important points. One is the question of organising the furniture sector, which employs about 35000 people.

PPWAWU began seriously directing attention to the furniture sector in 1987. In February of that year a group of workers who had been in touch with PPWAWU attended the NUF AW AGM with the intention of raising questions about the low wage increases negotiated by NUF AW; about the lack of democratic worker participation in NUF AW structures; and about the racial lines along which NUF AW was constituted. They were prevented from raising these points, but interested workers gathered around to discuss a PPWAWU pamphlet, and the organising drive was born.

PPWAWU set up a furniture organising committee, consisting of workers from various plants. Research showed that the Afcol group of companies, owned by SA Breweries, dominated the furniture industry nationally, and the union decided to target this group of companies.

Afcol owns furniture companies as well as a number of companies producing components used in the

manufacture of furniture - springs, foam and textiles for example. The 29 furniture companies owned by Afcol fall within PPWAWU's industrial sector. Other companies fall within the chemical (CWIU as well as the NACTU-affiliated SACWU), textile (ACTWUSA) and metal (NUMSA) sectors.

PPWAWU's strategy was to organise all 7 Afcol furniture plants in the Transvaal, and push for bargaining at company level with Afcol as a group, rather than aim for recognition at each individual company. After two months the union had a majority in five plants, and by September 1987 an agreement had been signed with Afcol. The agreement established a regional bargaining forum to which management and workers in each company sent representatives.

The agreement had a national scope in that it committed Afcol to bargaining with the union in each province as soon as it achieved a majority in one company in that province. PPWAWU has also organised Afcol plants in Natal and the Western Cape.

Thus, by the end of 1987 PPWAWU had succeeded in establishing a strong presence in the furniture sector, based in the biggest group of companies in the sector as well as other furniture factories. They had succeeded in negotiating increased pay and overtime pay, maternity benefits, as well as paid holidays on May 1 and June 16.

However, these advances were to be challenged in 1988 during the dispute at Star Furnishers.

Management resorts to 'iron fist'

Shop stewards and union organisers are convinced that the attitude of Afcot management had changed substantially by the time of the Star dispute. In the words of Ernest Masala, national organiser: "In the past they would listen, consider and discuss reasonable points. Now they say, 'We hear what you say, but we are not prepared to consider these points.' We have placed various alternatives before them. For example, we altered our demand from reinstatement of all workers at Star, to reinstatement of all except the original four dismissed. We proposed that their case be taken to arbitration.

"If they were serious, one would expect them to leave the room and caucus once we have suggested an alternative, so that they can look into it. But if the company spokesperson just says, "You can forget about that" without consulting his colleagues, then you will believe they have come with a preplanned position and they are not going to deviate.

"At our meeting they said they have been very co-operative, but the actions of our members are unacceptable. They said they are going to respond with an iron fist. That

showed they wanted to crush the union.

"We explained that if you have a Recognition Agreement, it does not mean that there are no issues to be resolved. There will still be issues and tough bargaining. You have to be prepared to negotiate seriously. But they seem to believe there should be no problems."

The view of the workers that management wants to smash the union is supported by a memo that was leaked to the workers. The memo is from Afcot head office to the manager of Star Furnishers and runs thus:

In reviewing the problems that you are presently facing, and taking into account the action already taken by you and your Management, we must be sure that we do not re-employ any of the workers who have now been discharged for taking part in the illegal strike.

By re-employing, even selectively which is not permissible, we will be breaking down the advantage we now hold and I believe cause more difficulties at a later stage.

I am certainly conscious that this will cause difficulties for you in having to re-train staff, but I think that the benefits that we will have gained from the rather traumatic experiences of last week will be worth it in the medium to long term.

(signed) Jack Chaskelson

The cynicism of management could hardly be clearer. But this is not an isolated instance.

Over the past two years there has been an increasingly hardline approach to unions on the part of management, characterised by inflexible bargaining positions, mass dismissals, lockouts, the use of court interdicts, a willingness to endure long strikes, and the more frequent intervention of police in industrial disputes. The increasing bitterness of shopfloor struggles was evident in the high-profile OK, SATS and mines strikes - as well as a host of less publicised strikes - in 1987, and is coming to a head at the moment in the massive confrontation between capital and labour over the the Labour Relations Amendment Bill and the three days of "peaceful national protest" called by COSATU and NACTU.

The Afcol strike is one of the many bitter struggles that have been fought and will be fought between employers and the state on the one side, determined to roll back and break the strength of the unions, and on the other, the unions fighting to maintain their organised bases and extend their gains. It is difficult not to predict a period of increasingly fierce class struggle ahead.

Apart from mass dismissal, management has used court interdicts and, allege shop stewards, encouraged police to detain 12 Star shop stewards at home in Soweto.

It is worth pointing out that, if

the new Labour Bill had already been passed into law, management would have had even more weapons at its disposal. They could have sued the union for production losses caused by the initial strike at Star as well as the first solidarity strike, since they were both "illegal"; and prevented the legal strike on the grounds that it was an issue workers had already struck over - although illegally - in the previous 12 months, as well as (possibly) on the grounds that it is a secondary solidarity strike.

At any rate, the strike shows the complexity of the management tactics and legal restraints that unions have to deal with in South Africa.

Workers take dispute to giant SAB shop stewards' council

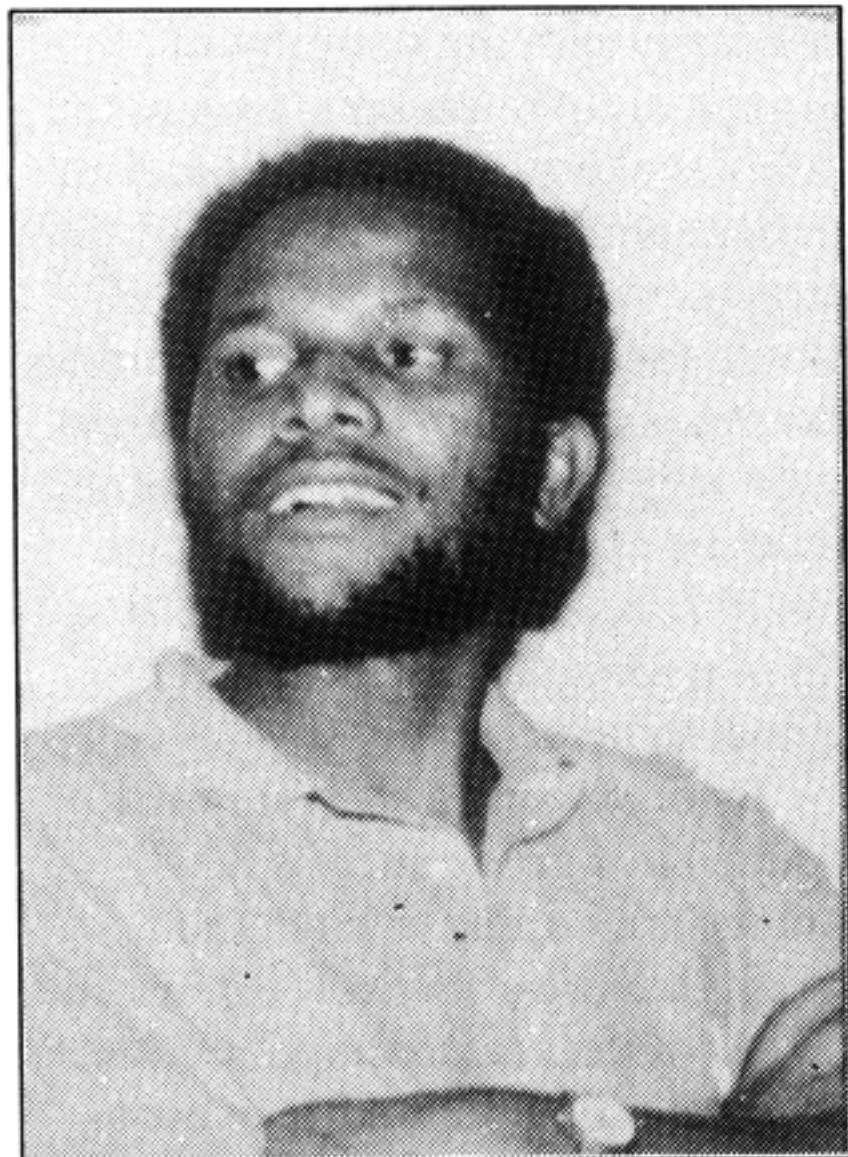
But if management is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its strategies, so are the unions. On the last weekend of May delegates from three COSATU affiliates and two NACTU affiliates met under the auspices of the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) to discuss forming a giant shop stewards' council (SSC) for the SA Breweries group of companies. Afcol workers took their dispute to this meeting, as did dismissed workers from OK's Roodepoort Hyperama and Southern Suns' Newlands Sun and

President Hotel.

Delegates discussed the disputes, and decided as a first step to go back to their various managements in each of their workplaces, and inform them as well as SAB Head Office that they are aware of the disputes and demand the immediate reinstatement of all workers.

SAB owns companies that operate in the retail, hotel, brewing, spirits, beverage, match manufacturing, and furniture sectors, and employ about 80 000 workers. About half of these workers, according to IUF local secretary Alan Horwitz, were represented at the meeting. Delegates came from PPWAWU, FAWU and CCAWUSA - all affiliated to COSATU - and the Food and Beverage Workers Union (FBWU) and National Union of Spirits and Allied Workers (NUSAW) affiliated to NACTU. They represented the beer division, Amalgamated Beverage Industries (Coke), Cape Wine, Lion Matches, OK, Southern Sun, Holiday Inn and Afcol. Workers from the Amrel group of retail stores, and from Johannesburg OK (organised by the Johannesburg branch of CCAWUSA) were absent. "That is a problem," says Horwitz. "We will try to get them in for the next meeting."

There were some tensions between affiliates of the two federations; as Horwitz says, "People do not just forget their his-



Listening intently to a fellow-worker

tory." But at the same time "there is a new feeling about the two federations working together, and that is what we are working towards." The IUF plans to meet with the International Metalworkers Federation in the metal sector, which already brings together affiliates of both NACTU and COSATU, in order to share experiences.

The aim for the SAB SSC is for delegates to represent companies that are part of the SAB group, rather than representing unions. Alan Horwitz says that "the first stage is to mobilise workers around the concept of a company council, to overcome company, sectoral and union divisions, because we all belong to one group." The council should be able to mobilise around

solidarity with the struggles of groups of SAB workers, such as the Afcoll strikers, as well as around an understanding of the economics and structure of the SAB group. This would facilitate developing common demands or group-wide campaigns over wages and conditions. The next meeting of the council, scheduled for 18 June, will discuss the setting up of permanent national and regional structures.

By organising a shop steward council in a group such as SAB, unions are hoping to pitch their strength more effectively against the power of the vast monopolies that dominate the South African economy. They hope to be able to co-ordinate their struggles with as

much sophistication as the monopolies employ. National company level bargaining allows for a more effective use of limited union resources, allows workers to challenge company policy at the level that it is formulated, and increases union bargaining muscle. SAB is ultimately owned by Anglo American. "It is no secret that our end goal is an Anglo American shop steward council," says Horwitz.

It will be a long hard battle. SAB will resist group level bargaining, claiming it has a "decentralised management" policy. The Afcoll strike, though, may just prove to be a powerful mobilising factor for building the unity in action of SAB workers.

New union aims to take on the small bosses

The Combined Small Factory Workers Union (CSFWU), has been establishing a presence in small factories and workshops in the light industrial corridor which stretches from Kew through Kramerville to Midrand in Johannesburg. We reproduce below an interview presented to SALB by a CSFWU official.

Question: *The policy of one union one industry is a cornerstone of progressive union policy. CSFWU organises across a range of industries, so could this not be seen as a weakening of the union movement?*

Answer: CSFWU is not really a general union, since it has a specific function, which is to organise small factories. This is a peculiarity that perhaps needs some explanation. The union finds its roots in an advice centre - the Alexandra Workers Advice Association (AWAA) - which was initiated by a resident's group in 1986. There are many such centres, as you know - Black Sash, Industrial Aid

Society, offices affiliated to the Advice Centres Association, most of them relying on the professional expertise of the Legal Resources Centre. And they all have more or less the same format and objectives - to help people who don't know how to find their way in the legal or bureaucratic maze.

In AWAA, we restricted ourselves at the outset to those problems that arise where the odds are most uneven, individuals from the working class being confronted by the State or by capital. (Where the matter is between individuals at loggerheads, we refer them to other advice centres.) In practice this has meant that most of our cases have been work-related.

Question: *Did you abandon the advice office, in developing the union, or what is the relation between the two?*

Answer: The Advice Association is still there, and still helps individuals outside of the factory context - domestic workers, the unemployed, people with housing problems, etc., but as time went by AWAA came under a lot of pressure from members to transform the Advice Association into a different kind of organisation, capable of incorporating those situations where organised resistance was possible. Moreover, we were gradually becoming aware of the limitations and faults of the advice centre approach.

Question: *Could you pinpoint these?*

Answer: There are two essential faults, I think. Bear in mind that the effect of racial legislation in this country is not simply to deprive one individual of his pension cheque, another of notice pay; it is to strip people of initiative and motivation. Workers are brought into conditions of anxiety and dependence so that their labour may be exploited. As advisers we no more than invoke the laughable degree of redress available in law - we fill out WCA forms, demand notice pay, threaten employers with court action, all of which is hardly a satisfactory response to the problems generated by systematic oppression.

Besides, the person seeking relief remains inactive, a victim, a complainant, while the adviser does things for him, knows the law, knows the ropes. This adviser is then in the position of a bureaucrat, whether you like it or not, and there is a very real tendency to become high-handed.

The worker's dependence, the adviser's power, actually reproduce the relations of domination which caused the problem in the first place. It is those relations themselves, not their symptoms or effects, that must be attacked. Advice Centres can expand into larger premises, hire more officers, etc., but cannot grow in the more profound sense of development in popular, mass organisation.

Question: *So you felt a need to break out of the mould of an advice centre. But was it always clear what other direction to take?*

Answer: Well, as I said, most of our cases were industrial problems - unfair dismissals, low wages, bad treatment, thus the form of a union seemed the appropriate one. We were also beginning to perceive that we needed to intervene in work problems more directly, be getting right inside factories, to apply pressure on management. We also wanted to be involved parties to Industrial Council conciliation meetings, and within the Industrial Court.

Question: *And so you established a union?*

Answer: We first considered the possibility of attaching the advice office to a shopsteward local ... but that would have been a top-down affair, with no chance of releasing the organising energies of workers in general. We feared it would be a bit amateurish. Eventually we did the most direct and clear thing possible, and formed the union. At present the union has 850 paid-up members. Its structure is made up of a governing body consisting of twelve workers, six elected at the AGM, and the other six by shopstewards. From the governing body, the structure goes into two directions. The one direction is of an executive committee, and the other is a shopsteward council. Staff and general secretary are appointed by the governing body.

Question: *With hindsight do you think the move was a correct one?*

Answer: Emphatically yes. CSFWU is not a year old and, even while restricting itself because of severely limited resources, it has gained a foothold in nearly fifty workplaces - light engineering plants, motor workshops, paint and chemical manufacturers, construction, catering, distributive and meat trades, as well as workers employed either privately or institutionally as domestic and general workers; new

workers (some of whom earn as little as R40 per week) are coming to the office daily to find out about the union. Small factories where employees previously had no chance or hope whatever of union membership are now active in a full union organisation.

Question: *I assume there are problems inherent in the small size of the factories you organise?*

Answer: Indeed. Not to forget that there are advantages too. But to begin with the former. The main administrative problem is precisely that which makes large unions reluctant to take them on; union officials have a great deal of work to do at each factory, yet the gain in membership is very small.

The difficulties faced by these workers derives from the 'relations in production'.(1) You must realise that these really are *small* firms we are speaking of. There are some in the union with as few as five workers. The largest single factory organised has only 40 workers. In such cases ownership and management is usually vested in the same person, whose rule over his employees is direct and immediate. It differs only in being either paternalistic, or despotic. In both cases the fury generated within the owner when the union appears on the scene (a snake in his paradise) is quite alarming. It is a personal crisis for him. He takes the view that the

workers were his 'family'; alternatively, he considers that he has a right to their labour and they are his vassals. Now suddenly they are not 'his' at all. They say they belong to the union. As children, they have betrayed him; as slaves, they have revolted. Either way they are in for a lot of shit. Being few in number, employees have to face their bosses' rage pretty directly. And it is not only his rage that gives workers problems to solve - he is capable of very subtle manoeuvres to try to restore the old relations.

The boss is furthermore likely to be ignorant, having never felt the need to acquaint himself with the industrial laws applicable to his business. This combination of indignation, rage, unfairness, ignorance and cunning gives workers and organisers a lot of work to do before they can achieve fairly reasonable work conditions.

A recent struggle illustrates this and the ultimate powerlessness of workers in the small industry situation. At C, a workshop servicing industrial machines, workers have been victimised for some time while management has resisted the fact of the union and refused to recognise it. When one day the battle came to a head, with workers walking out of a meeting called by management at which the boss was discussing the union but refusing workers the right to a union representative, management went completely wild at this loss of control over their employees.

Threats to close down the workshop were advanced, the staff was immediately put onto short time, and within the next two days three workers were dismissed, and subsequently another two were "re-trenched". A court application in this respect has been filed, but one can wait up to six months or longer for the case to be heard.

We recently won a similar case in the Industrial Court - employees who had been dismissed for union activity were reinstated retrospectively. The employer however refused to comply with the order (which was given, incidentally, six months after workers had lost their jobs and been without income) and the matter had to be handed over to lawyers, the Johannesburg Magistrates Court and the police. Nine months later, workers still have no results.

Question: *You mentioned that advantages could also derive from the small size of the factories.*

Answer: Yes, seen from another angle, the small size of workplaces gives the union a possible advantage. Relations between management and workers is so immediate, the boss is actually vulnerable here. He would obviously prefer to be able to gain his surplus without undue unpleasantness. Thus he makes workers feel that he is doing them a favour by employing them! When it happens

therefore, that workers explicitly reject this falsehood, and when they begin to exert sustainable demands, undermining his arbitrary rule, a measure of discomfort is apparent within the firm, which in some cases leads to harshness and dismissals, but might also contrarily lead to great improvements, in the employer's effort to re-establish overall authority and patronage. Not infrequently it pays us to rely on this, rather than on the limited benefits of Industrial Court awards. At B, for example, a small distributive concern, management was highly indignant at the fact of his employees joining a union, and in rivalry put up his wages by 70%. Management at L, a light manufacturing business, keep increasing wages in the hope that workers will abandon the union, whose presence embarrasses them. Wages in this factory are probably some of the highest in the whole area, reaching R4-75 per hour.

The smallness of the factories, and the variety of industries participating in the union, together generate a lot of work for union officials. On the other hand, these features also offer rewards, in that organisers are exposed to many different kinds of tasks.

Question: *Are workers totally reliant, then, on the specific personality and response pattern of their particular employer? Surely industrial law,*

the unfair labour practice, etc., afford a measure of protection against wildly unreasonable behaviour?

Answer: The concept of fairness is an interesting one. In sport, fairness is a necessary condition. Much trouble is taken to ensure that neither side has an *unfair advantage*. Most people would be quick to pronounce a race between two people, where the one has a head start of 200m, unfair. There has to be some measure of equality between participants.

Relations between workers and management are simply unequal in that management controls production. Management is in control, and concepts of fairness as recognised in law are in fact built on a foundation of entrenched and inherent inequality. Time and time again workers realise through struggle that the real struggle is for control of production. Anything less than this can only achieve the economic functioning of a workers' organisation - trade union as mediator, as adm

Question: *What do workers achieve through the union, then? Or, to put the question more broadly, does the presence of the union not equalise things between employers and workers?*

Answer: No. You ask what workers achieve, so let us put it this

way. It is often the very smallness, the inconspicuousness of firms of this scale that enables them to exploit. Take for example a fast food outlet, really just a small cafe, run by a man and his wife, employing six people. Wages are R50 per week, where the minimum stipulates R62. The staff work 55 hours per week, which is 10 hours over the limit (overtime therefore, but not even paid at normal rates!). In the course of a year, the saving for the owner, in blatant underpayment, comes to over R10 000. That is, R10 000 robbed from the legal entitlement of a mere six workers. Multiply that figure for a factory of sixty workers, and you get some idea of the gain small-plant capitalists can extract. We are speaking of a *marginal* gain, over and above the far larger amounts taken in the form of profit. Remember too that even the minimum we are referring to is abysmally low. R248 per month in Johannesburg is outrageous exploitation in return for hard, exhausting work.

Workers can make some wage gains in challenging this super-exploitation. But employers are constantly telling workers and union organisers "we can get anyone off the street for R40 or less a week" - and we know they speak the truth. This puts power almost absolutely into the hands of employers. Unions can and do challenge this power; but a union can never establish *equality* between workers and bosses. The

bosses are dominant, and we must not shirk seeing it and stating it.

Question: *But there are processes of conciliation, there is protection by the Industrial Court, and you do, do you not, make use of these institutions? They provide a shield.*

Answer: In a way, of course. But I wonder to what extent this shield also conceals from us real domination. It is that, after all, that provides the scope for exploitation. The union does not offer total protection by any means. As I said earlier we have had dismissals following our announcement of the union presence, and not been able to get back the jobs.

As for Industrial Councils, we have come to expect most council officials to take the side of employers quite unashamedly. In many cases action taken by employers to dismiss or retrench, which leads to Industrial Court hearings favouring the union, have been the direct result of advice given to employers by councils or even by the Department of Manpower.

Question: *So what is the advantage of union organisation?*

Answer: Unions are the proper place for *preparing* workers to be in control of production. We speak here not of ownership, which is less important, but of real control. Only then will relations in factories be

anything other than domination of capital over labour. We should intervene in the space of production, but not with illusions.

Question: *To move onto internal relations. How do union members relate to the union and to one another?*

Answer: Yes, that aspect is even more important in our view, than all the technical matters arising from the actual job of negotiating with capital.

The feeling workers had when they pressed AWAA to alter the advice office in this direction was really sound. Relations between the organisers/officials of the union, and workers, have really changed. It is now in general forum that problems are presented, analysed, and debated. We have general meetings every week, and it is to these meetings that workers bring their problems. There is an interchange of skills and a flow of opinions at these meetings that validates each and every person and enables them to contribute fully. The chair is taken by a different member at each meeting, so that the skills of handling meetings become common property. It is really at these meetings that mandates are given, and within a week report-backs are expected. And it is important to note that members do not feel themselves to be clients, but members in a very full and active sense. It is they, by and large, who undertake

the organising of new factories, who advise and encourage one another. The problem that was formerly presented by a victim to an expert for solution, is transformed. It is now an aspect of class struggle, dealt with by organised workers and organisers, on terms of parity and comradeship. The situation does not (as did the advice office mode) reproduce relations of paternalism. Other unions also have resolved, in this way precisely, that major problem of the advice office, wage commission, etc., - the liberal aspect.

Question: *Let us agree that you gain in the transition from an advice centre to a union; is it not a further logical gain to develop from a union such as CSFWU to an industrial form of union organisation?*

Answer: You have to keep pace with workers themselves, from whom the energy and initiative must come if an organisation is to remain healthy. Large unions simply will not take on small factories, or if they say they do, in practice they neglect them, do not keep faith with them. Many of our members have come to us after a rejection or a referral from a large union, or because of a bad experience with organisers from another union. This is easily understood: unions' resources, especially in manpower, are over-stretched. They just cannot afford the time needed for the limited gains of very small workforce num-

SMALL FACTORIES

bers. And for CSFWU to ignore this reality, and allow members' energy to become nullified, instead of concentrated and stimulated as it is now, would be very foolish.

Of course we see the advantage of industrial unions, and the correctness of this stance. Wherever possible, we advise workers to seek affiliation to the larger unions. But

AWAA and the CSFWU draw workers each day from the light industrial area from Kew through to Midrand, which relies on the labour pools of Alex and Tembisa. In this situation, to follow the principle of industrial unions blindly would render us inactive; it would be to abdicate the task of thorough worker organisation.

Trade union organisation and health and safety

Trade unions have used various approaches to health and safety organisation in the workplace. IAN MACUN⁺ discusses some of the strategies, and suggests a flexible approach based on specific workplace conditions, but guided by the general principles set out in COSATU's health and safety resolution.

The second COSATU National Congress held in July 1987, adopted a resolution on health and safety which provides general principles to guide affiliates on health and safety. The resolution calls on COSATU affiliates to enter into health and safety agreements with employers, and for workers to elect their own Safety Stewards/representatives at every factory and mine.

These two clauses provide the first policy level response, by COSATU, to the Machinery &

Occupational Safety Act (MOSA), which came into operation in October 1984. The resolution as a whole also reflects the ongoing concern with health and safety by unions over the last few years, although this concern has not always been backed by systematic action on the issue.

The State and especially employers, have also paid increasing attention to occupational health and safety during the last few years. Central to this development has been

⁺ *The writer works for the Industrial Health Research Group. He gratefully acknowledges assistance given by other members of IHRG*

MOSA, which has clearly placed the responsibility for providing a safe and healthy workplace on management. The wording of the Act has, however, allowed management to interpret it in such a way that they can control the organisational structures established in terms of the Act, namely the Safety Committees and Safety Representatives (Safety Reps).

Between the time that MOSA came into operation and the end of 1986, some 50 000 Safety Reps have been appointed and approximately 18 000 Safety Committees have been established, throughout the country. (Dept of Manpower, RP. 79/1987). But what are the implications of this growth in safety organisation? How has management responded and how have trade unions responded to this legislation? Further more, what are the best strategies for unions to follow in the future?

MOSA and management

MOSA's emphasis on the responsibility of employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace, has forced management in many plants to take a closer look at the production process with a view to health and safety problems. But this has not always led to real improvement.

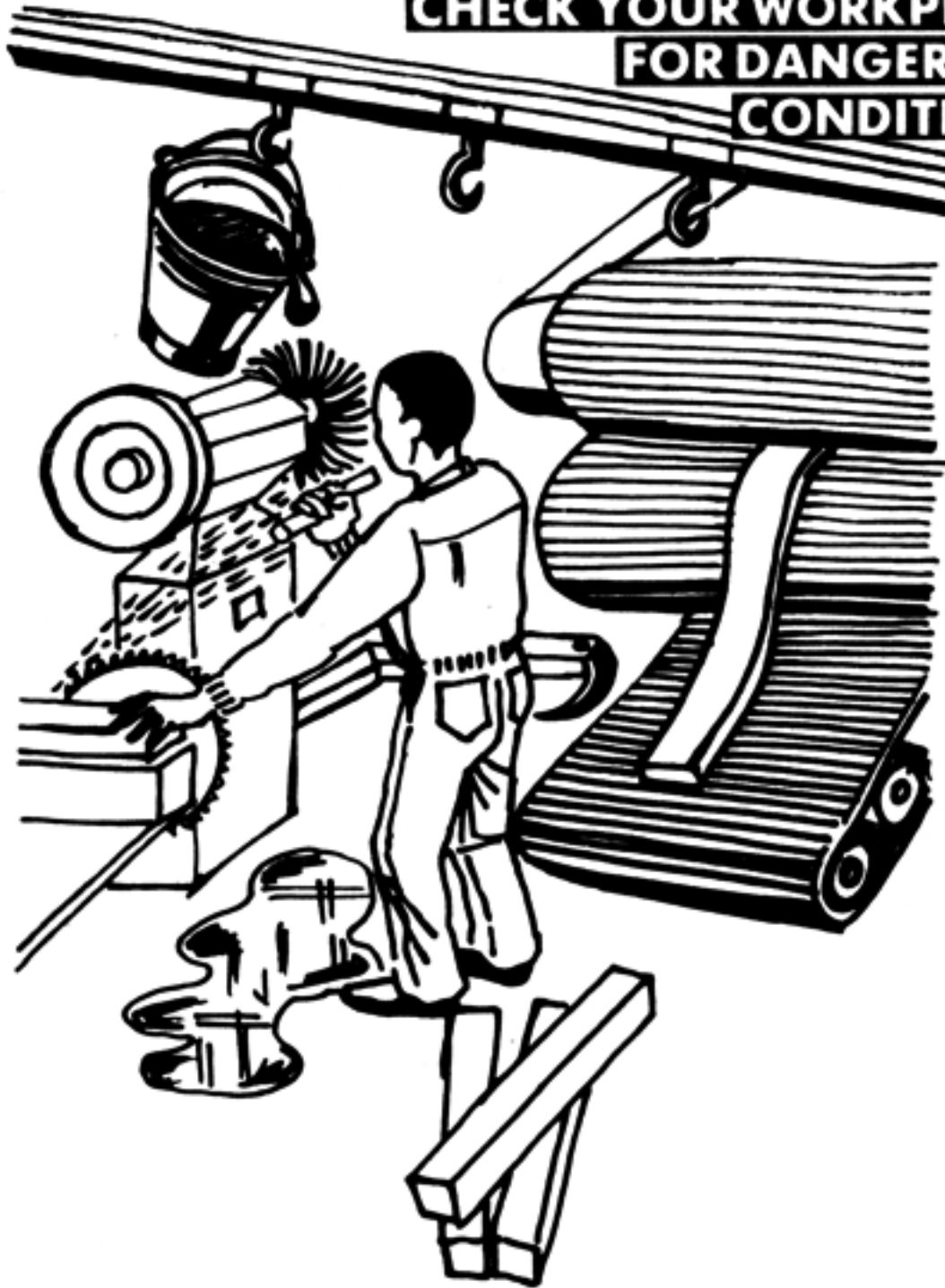
The general trend is for managements to consider the area of health and safety their prerogative and to exclude unions from any real participation. On the basis of observations in the Cape Town area,⁺ most Safety Reps have been appointed by management and most of the Safety Reps are appointed from management and skilled workers. It is very likely that this is the pattern in other parts of the country as well.

Management nearly always determines the structure and membership of the Safety Committees. Big companies usually set up a central Safety Committee consisting of top management, departmental heads and the Safety Officer. This Committee make makes the major decisions. Below this are a number of departmental Safety Committees, consisting of the Departmental Heads and the Safety Reps and/or supervisory staff. In this structure, reports go up to the central Safety Committee, where decision are made and are then relayed back down to the departmental Safety Committees. This kind of structure can fragment health and safety organisation in the workplace by dealing with matters on a departmental basis. The 'top down' approach can also be divisive, as it excludes involvement of all employees and ensures that Safety

⁺ *The arguments put forward are based on a survey carried out amongst 36 firms and 14 trade unions in the Cape Town area. The survey was carried out during 1986-87 and consisted of structured in-depth interviews with management representatives and union officials.*

ACCIDENTS KILL 2800 WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA EVERY YEAR

**CHECK YOUR WORKPLACE
FOR DANGEROUS
CONDITIONS**



1. **INSPECT YOUR WORKPLACE**
2. **REPORT DANGEROUS CONDITIONS TO YOUR SHOPSTEWARD**
3. **INVESTIGATE ALL ACCIDENTS**
4. **KEEP RECORDS OF ALL ACCIDENTS**

Health and safety poster

Courtesy of Workplace Information Group (WIG)

Reps are accountable only to management.

However, in spite of management's domination of health and safety organisation, it seems that the Safety Rep and Safety Committee system are not always used as the main channel for addressing health and safety issues. In a number of factories in Cape Town, problems relating to health and safety are still dealt with on an individual basis, that is, between the worker concerned and the foreman, supervisor or company medical personnel.

There is also a problem in the Safety Reps' role. Often their functions are very narrowly defined and their role limited to carrying out monthly inspections. This limited view is in fact supported by MOSA itself and undermines what could potentially be a very useful structure.

This means that some employers have adopted a very narrow definition of compliance with the law. This is limited to setting up the Safety Rep and Safety Committee structures and seeing that these operate according to the minimum requirements of the law. Very few companies appear to comply with the broader terms of MOSA, namely to ensure that workers are free from the threat of injury, illness or death owing to circumstances at work.

The trend outlined certainly supports the general argument that "health and safety is an extra that employers may or may not decide to

purchase, rather than an integral part of the way work is done". (Kinnersley quoted in Maller and Steinberg, SALB Vol.9 No.7, p.61) This makes it all the more important for unions to engage employers on the issue of health and safety and to use the sections of MOSA that could strengthen their ability to represent workers on health and safety issues.

Trade unions and MOSA

Trade union approaches to health and safety have varied and while some union organisers, especially in COSATU and NACTU affiliated unions, have a clear awareness of the issue, they are often less aware of the legal framework (i.e. MOSA) governing health and safety.

Some unions have real difficulty in sustaining a focus on health and safety issues. There can be many reasons for this, but two important ones are that, either their members work in industries where health and safety problems are not as obvious as in other industries, or because the unions are forced to use their often limited resources on achieving better wages and improved conditions of service across as broad a range of factories as possible. There are also a number of potential difficulties in taking up health and safety issues. Often it is expensive and time consuming to make effective improvements in a workplace. Negotiating health and safety can

also involve a set of fairly technical issues which may put unions at a disadvantage in negotiations with employers.

Unions which have dealt with health and safety and which are aware of MOSA and its implications, have responded to the law in different ways. Some of the more conservative unions have accepted MOSA as a step in the right direction and advise their members to participate in the structures established by management.

Other unions, mainly COSATU and NACTU affiliates, have varied in their response. Some refuse any involvement in the Safety Committee and Safety Rep structures as a matter of principle. Others insist on the right to at least elect Safety Reps, but ignore the Safety Committees as these are seen to be powerless and management dominated. A few unions have adopted the approach that shop stewards should carry out the functions of Safety Reps. In the Cape Town area there is also an example of a health and safety agreement being negotiated, which codifies a set of principles, procedures and structures for health and safety organisation in a particular company (see SALB Vol.11 No.7, pp 42-47).

Progressive union responses have thus varied from attempting to inject some democracy into the structures provided for by the Act, to maintaining the safety function in

established union structures i.e. shop steward committees, or nego-

Strategies for organisation on health and safety

tiating an alternative which makes up for many deficiencies in the legal framework.

While it is not entirely clear how these different options are working in practice, they each contain strengths and weaknesses in relation to the law and in relation to organisational questions around health and safety.

1. Electing safety representatives

Firstly, electing Safety Reps tackles one of the major weaknesses in MOSA, namely worker participation. Without such participation there can be no proper organisation of health and safety in the workplaces, as, to quote the COSATU resolution, "Bosses cannot be entrusted with the safety and health of workers." However, the election of Safety Reps as distinct from shop stewards does raise a number of organisational questions:

- * How would an elected Safety Rep relate to other structures in the firm, for instance, a Safety Committee or a shop stewards committee?
- * To whom would the Safety Rep be accountable?

* How would union members ensure support for an elected Safety Rep?

* What responsibilities, and what rights, should Safety Reps have and who should provide health and safety training?

2. Shop stewards responsible for health and safety

The second option, of having shop stewards carry out the function of Safety Reps answers some of these questions. In this case the worker responsible for health and safety would be accountable to the shop steward structure and thus to the workers as a whole. There would not be a separate health and safety structure. Obvious problems, however may arise if shop stewards become overloaded and are forced to neglect their health and safety tasks.

It should be stressed that these tasks should go far beyond the fairly narrow conception of a Safety Rep's role contained in MOSA. The Safety Rep should be involved in a day to day monitoring of workplace problems and hazards and should represent workers in all health and safety matters. To facilitate such a role would require the negotiation of additional rights, which do not exist in the law at present. These

would be rights, such as:

* to be involved in all accident and incident investigations

* to represent workers at inquiries

* to have access to technical information about substances used at work, results of workplace or medical monitoring, etc.

* it is also important that Safety Reps have additional time off for training to become familiar with the specific knowledge that they need.

At present, most Safety Reps are trained by NOSA⁺ (National Occupational Safety Association), whose one day course for Safety Reps is very general and deals mainly with NOSA's interpretation of the principles of accident prevention and investigation. This is a function that quite a few managements are reluctant to involve the Safety Reps in anyway.

3. Health and safety agreements

Health and safety agreements can provide rights far superior to those provided for in MOSA, but they can also take a long time to negotiate and may mean that unions are unable to gain basic rights on health and safety until such an agreement is signed. In this respect

+ Between 1983 and 1986, NOSA trained an average of 43 300 persons per year. Not all of these were Safety Representatives, but the figure does demonstrate the pervasive influence of this organisation in industry. (Dept. of Manpower, RP.79/1987)

health and safety agreements are open to the same manipulation by management as are recognition agreements (see SALB Vol 12 No.3, pp10-15). This problem may force unions to adopt different strategies towards health and safety agreements such as negotiating a very short agreement on basic rights or including a section on health and safety in their recognition agreement. This last option is one that is already being followed by some CO-SATU and NACTU affiliates.

A crucial feature of the agreements entered into thus far is their formal separation of management and worker structures and tasks in the area of health and safety. This is based on the fact that health and safety issues often involve a conflict of interest between workers and management, and therefore workers need independent structures to negotiate around these issues. Independent structures, whether they are modelled on MOSA as is the case with most health and safety agreements, or whether they base themselves on existing organisational structures in the workplace, also take into account two entirely different processes, namely:

- * setting policies and defining practices,
- and secondly,
- * policing the way in which practices are carried out.

The first function is clearly a sub-

ject for negotiation between management and trade unions, whereas the second could be a joint exercise. Given that most employers assume health and safety to be their prerogative and that MOSA places responsibility on them, it is unlikely that they will give up all control of the organisation of health and safety in the firm.

However, this is not necessarily a problem, as long as unions are able to establish representative structures which can monitor health and safety in accordance with their members' interests. If management were to establish their own structures to monitor health and safety, this would implicitly make health and safety an industrial relations issue, rather than an area of "co-operation" and consensus.

MOSA could thus be implemented in a way that allows for the separation of management and worker structures and tasks in the area of health and safety, via separate Safety Committees, and separate Safety Representatives if necessary. In the agreements entered in to so far, the unions have the right to elect Safety Reps whose job is to inspect the workplace and police health and safety matters on a day-to-day basis. This does not exclude the appointment of Safety Reps by management, from supervisory staff, or to represent non-unionised employees. However, given the problems of agreements in general, a question

that remains is whether a substantive health and safety agreement is necessary to achieve such an arrangement.

Conclusions

One of the key issues posed by union responses is how to integrate health and safety issues with workplace organisation and to prevent the isolation of workers dealing with these issues. The way in which this is achieved depends on two crucial factors, namely, the nature of the work process and its associated hazards, and the size of the firm.

All factories have their hazards, but where production involves the use of particularly hazardous substances or processes, the strategy of entering into a health and safety agreement may be the most appropriate to ensure a comprehensive approach and to provide the framework for improvements in health and safety. Where less hazardous forms of production take place, basic rights around health and safety could be achieved via an inclusion in the recognition agreement.

As far as size of firm is concerned, it is more likely that shop stewards in smaller firms will be able to deal effectively with health and safety matters as an extension of collective bargaining. In such a situation, integration with workplace organisation should also be relatively easy to maintain. In larger

firms, especially where there are particular hazards, a reliance on special structures and procedures may be the surest way of consistently dealing with health and safety matters while avoiding separation, or isolation, of these matters from organisation in the plant.

Trade union strategies towards health and safety would thus be most effective if they were forged in relation to conditions in particular plants or industries and in relation to experiences in addressing the issue. This does not have to mean a piecemeal approach, but one that is based on a clear idea of what is required for a union to make health and safety an integral part of its activities.

Policy guidelines by unions are important particularly when they embody the principles of negotiation around health and safety, worker participation and establishment of procedures that are independent of the legal framework. The COSATU resolution provides an important step forward, and one that could usefully inform the activities of its affiliates. Federation policy could also be seen as an important guide to action, especially in the light of the widespread implementation of MOSA, management domination of the structures and a common refusal to deal with health and safety via other mechanisms.

Response to the Article on the Role of Service Organisations by Some Members of LACOM, DURBAN, in SALB, Volume 12 Number 8

by **SHIRLEY WALTERS**, Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of Western Cape.

I wish to respond to the recent article in the *South African Labour Bulletin* on the role of service organisations. I found the article at times insightful, and at others surprising and confusing. What I found most surprising was the nature of the article itself.

The authors argue very strongly for service organisations to act in disciplined and structurally accountable ways. However it is not clear that the authors followed their own advice in the process of writing this article. It seems to me that the nature of the article contradicts the argument that is being put forward.

In order to check whether this point is true, I would appreciate clarity from the authors on the following questions: Why was the article written by 'some' members of LACOM, was it not written in con-

sultation with LACOM's constituencies? In line with their argument should it not have gone through a range of organisational procedures in order that the authors be structurally accountable to their constituencies both inside and outside their organisation? Have they not, according to their own argument about the generation of knowledge, reinforced their roles as experts by not following the procedures that they advocate? The nature of the article itself seems to hold within it a range of real contradictions and tensions that members of service organisations live with daily.

In the article the authors seem at times to recognise the complex and at time contradictory nature of service organisations. They make a number of important, insightful points which demonstrate their fine understanding of the realities. For example, they argue that certain of the inherent constraints of service organisations relate to their funding base, their organisational forms and structures. They correctly state that "service organisations are structurally unable to transcend some fundamental limits which arise from their existence". They recognise the fact that organisations are dynamic and determined to a large degree by the context in which they operate. However, at other times, they contradict this basic understanding with an ahistorical, static view of the role and functioning of organisations.

Democracy and accountability are flexible concepts

In the article there are a number of very sweeping generalisations which are not defined contextually. Service organisations are spoken about as if they are all the same regardless of purpose, functions, and locations. 'Mass organisations' be they for workers, youth, women or students are similarly spoken about in an undifferentiated way. This, I believe, seriously limits the value of the arguments, as organisations and their relationships with one another should not be determined outside their specific historical context. The authors are inclined to reify certain relationships and processes as if they are 'correct' regardless of time, place or purpose. They forget that organisational questions are fundamentally political and therefore cannot be decided in isolation.

Illustrations of the above point can be seen in their discussion of the issues of democracy and accountability. For example, on page 25 they give a list of what 'should' be done in order to ensure 'genuine accountability and unity'. While the list of 'do's and don'ts' may be perfectly acceptable for certain organisations operating in particular ways at particular times and in particular places, for others operating under different circumstances the proposed practices may be im-

practical and politically ill-advised.

A contemporary example to illustrate my argument is the new methods of organising that have had to develop both in certain service and mass-based organisations because of the State of Emergency. Organisations are continually having to redefine their theory and practice of democracy in response to the economic, social and political circumstances. The meanings of concepts like 'democracy' and 'accountability' cannot be seen as static. They are defined and re-defined in the process of organisation and political struggle. It seems that the authors tend to view these concepts ahistorically.

Service organisations are not just functionaries of mass organisations

Another problem I have with the authors' generalised discussion of service organisations is that the nature and purpose of service organisations appears to have been oversimplified. This surprised me. It appears that the authors have fallen into the contemporary trap of portraying 'service' organisations as having purely to act as functionaries of the mass-based organisations. This view denies the reality. It also denies the historically important role that many service organisations have and are fulfilling. Certain service organisations have played important roles in the development

of theory and practice within the fields of health, education, literacy, removals, research, etc.

Most 'service' organisations which locate themselves within the progressive movement inevitably have both service and political goals. Besides the mainly reactive service provision role, many of the workers in the service organisations would also be developing proactive and innovative responses within their fields of expertise which may be in research, education, resources, information and media.

For example, in the area of arbitrary removals by the State service organisations working in this field have on the one hand to see to immediate needs of an affected community, but on the other they have to play a proactive, innovative role by helping the often isolated community to understand and strategise to resist what is happening to them. The service organisations would have had to anticipate the needs by perhaps researching and developing educational materials and media to be ready when needed.

In this respect service organisations fulfill similar functions to some progressive university intellectuals. Similar arguments, which cannot be discussed here, but which apply to progressive academics can therefore begin to apply to them. For example, it would seem important to recognise when discussing the role of service workers the potential

relevance in some situations of concepts such as 'relative autonomy' and the dangers of becoming intellectual hacks'!

The authors, I believe, have presented the purpose and functions of service organisations and their workers in an one-dimensional way which does not take into account the dynamic relationship between the reactive service work and the proactive, intellectual work. Different structures and relationships with organisations may be appropriate depending on which purposes are to be achieved.

Experts and power

Another problem that I have with the article relates to the authors' concern about the role of 'experts'. The authors seem to question the validity of having 'experts'. While I recognise that this point is part of a complex debate about the division of labour in society, I believe that the concerns expressed about 'experts' are misplaced in the article. It would seem that the authors would want to get rid of work specialists and achieve a situation in society where everyone is supposed to be able to do everything.

Are they serious about not seeing the necessity and value of utilising the expertise, for example, of lawyers when necessary? This seems a romantic notion when taking into account the highly sophisticated and technological world in which we

live. While I agree that there are problems with the practices of most 'experts', I would argue that it is not the fact of having experts that is the problem, but rather the relationship of power that experts have over others in society. It is therefore this power relation that is the problem which needs to be addressed.

While the authors do not talk about the problem in this way, they do seem to recognise the relationship of power as a problem. In order to address this problem they sensibly recommend more structured, disciplined relationships between the 'experts' in service organisations and the organisations they serve as a way of controlling this relationship.

The concluding point I would like to make relates to what seems to be a paradox in their argument. The authors have gone to great lengths to critique service organisations and by implication themselves as workers in a service organisation. But at the end of the article they state that it is impossible for service organisations "to transcend some fundamental limits" and that it is the "mass organisations (that) bear the responsibility for developing the structures necessary to control service organisations ...".

The lack of control of workers in service organisations is thus placed firmly at the door of the mass organisations. The article appears in the end to shift from a critique of service organisations to a critique of

mass organisations who, they appear to argue, are apparently unable or unwilling to "clearly define the tasks to be undertaken" and so are not easily able to form contractual relationships with service workers. Mass organisations, they warn, need to take "a great deal of care and vigilance" in dealing with service organisations like them!

Ahistorical arguments

While I believe that the article points explicitly or implicitly to important critiques of both service and mass organisations, and it makes the important recommendation concerning the need for structured, contractual relationships between service and mass organisations, the arguments become at times confusing and contradictory. I believe that, rather than writing in an ahistorical, sweeping way about service and mass organisations in general, it would have been more helpful if the authors had situated their arguments within a given context.

The readers would then have been in a stronger position to assess the issues and relate them to their own situations. This approach would also have counteracted the tendency within the article to reify organisational practices. Organisational issues, I believe, cannot usefully be discussed outside of their historical contexts, as organisational issues are fundamentally political.

Israeli trade unions - no help for Palestinian workers

The last edition carried articles on Palestinian trade unions. In this edition, MARTY ROSENBLUTH looks at the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut's attitudes towards Palestinian workers and their unions. ⁺

Two years ago, workers at the Berman Bakery in Jerusalem walked out in protest over poor pay and conditions. All 35 were from the West Bank and were registered with Israeli government labour exchanges. Some had been at the bakery for several years. Yet they were making one-third of the wages paid to an Israeli for the same job. They complained to the plant's workers' committee but the union did nothing. Haim Maman, spokesperson for the Histadrut, the General Federation of Workers in Israel, told them, "We have no commit-

ment to West Bank workers".

Legally, all workers in Israel, regardless of nationality, are covered by the contracts reached between the Histadrut federation and employers. All doing the same job should be paid the same wage. In reality, this rarely happens. According to Professor Michal Shaleve, a researcher at the Hebrew University, had the Palestinian workers at Berman's earned what was due to them under the legally binding collective agreement for the bakery industry, their wages would have risen three-fold.

⁺ This article is taken from *International Labour Reports/Issue 24/November-December 1987*

Taxation

Statements from the Histadrut on the status of workers from the Occupied Territories are contradictory. In a recent interview in 'Labour in Israel', the federations' English-language magazine largely aimed at foreign trade unions, General Secretary Israel Kessar tried to suggest that it is the Israeli government which stands in the way of the Histadrut organising workers from the Occupied Territories. A few years earlier, however, Kessar's predecessor Yeruslam Meshel wrote in a letter to foreign trade unionists, "We have never attempted to formally organise these workers as Histadrut members in order to avoid the impression that we support the annexation of the administered (sic) territories".

Both these statements are misleading. All West Bank and Gaza workers who work through government labour exchanges pay a fee to the Histadrut. The government deducts an "organisation tax" of 1% from their wages and gives it to the Histadrut to provide "trade union protection". The Histadrut claims to be unable to

give such protection as it lacks access to the necessary records. The result is that collective agreements go unmonitored and employers benefit by paying discriminatory wages.

Without representation

Although they pay dues to the Histadrut, West Bank and Gazan workers are not entitled to vote in union elections, nor to take part in local workers' councils. They are even denied observer status on



Israeli troops versus the Palestinian people

plant workers' committees.

"We go to the labour office with a problem and they say that we should go to the Histadrut. We go to the Histadrut and they say we should go to the labour office", complains a worker from Gaza in a

food-processing factory near Tel Aviv. "We had a problem in our plant. Overtime hours weren't showing up on our wage receipts. The boss said the money was going for deductions. When we asked 'what deductions?', he said 'go and complain to the Histadrut". We went to the plant committee, to the regional works council and to the labour office. Nothing. Nobody helped us."

Histadrut organisations have supported, and sometimes been responsible, for outright hostility towards Palestinian workers. In 1984 when Jewish workers at the Dimona Textile factory were laid off, the Histadrut workers' council demanded that the company fire all the Palestinian workers before any Jews. Mordechai Amster, at the time head of both the Construction Workers' Union and the Histadrut committee formed to press the government into giving the union 'control' over the workers of the Occupied Territories, demanded that "building workers from the Territories will be the first to be fired".

In July of this year, the Histadrut Labour Council in Kiryat Gat threatened a general strike when a Palestinian from Gaza tried to buy a building materials factory in the town. The Chairman of the factory's Histadrut workers' committee denied that the workers' motives were racist but said, "We will not allow a Jewish factory to come under ownership of an Arab from the Territories".

Millions a year

The Histadrut is making moves to organise Palestinian workers, but many believe this is only to get control of their wage deductions. Money worth millions of US dollars a year is taken from Palestinian wages by the Israeli Labour Ministry for pensions, insurance and other benefits. Shlomo Ben Yona, an Histadrut Executive Council member critical of his federation, says that shifts in industries like construction towards employing Palestinians, whose deductions go to the government, rather than Jewish workers, whose deductions go to the Histadrut, have put Histadrut pension funds into difficulties. "When the Histadrut talks about 'organising' Palestinian workers," Ben Yona says, "they only want to organise their money."

The Histadrut is currently arguing for a trial year in which its shopstewards and labour councils would collect the deductions from the legal workers, and try to organise the unregistered workers. As an Israeli journalist recently stated, "The issue is wrapped in some paternal socialist concern, but at its core are the enormous amounts of money which flow into the Israeli Finance Ministry's Treasury".

'Front organisations'

While the Histadrut denounces attacks on Solidarnosc in Poland

and unions in South Africa, it keeps silent about the severe harassment by the Israeli military authorities of Palestinian unions. In a recent letter to a British union which had enquired about the town arrest order imposed on Shehadeh al-Minawi, a prominent Palestinian union leader, the Histadrut claimed that such measures were justified because "trade unions in the West Bank have been 'trade unions' only as a cover for illicit activities against Israel".

The letter alleged that Minawi is co-ordinator for the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in Nablus.

In a briefing sent to all British unions, the Histadrut has charged the Palestinian unions are 'front' organisations "who do little if anything for the welfare of workers". The unions, it says, are "bases for hostile terrorist actions". No evidence to support these allegations is offered. Evidence of the welfare work done by Palestinian unions is ignored.

Histadrut - Israel's second largest employer

The Histadrut proudly boasts that it has never been "just another trade union federation". It is in fact the second largest employer in Israel after the government, employing almost a quarter of the total Israel workforce. Amongst others, the federation owns Israel's largest construction company, Solel Boneh, the Egged and Dan bus companies, and Koor Industrial Holding Company which has some 130 industrial companies in Israel and abroad, and trading offices in New York, Amsterdam and Hong Kong.

Two of Koor Industries subsidiaries are Soltam and Tadiran. Soltan produces sophisticated weapons of war such as cannons and mortars. Tadiran, jointly owned with US General Telephone and Electronics International, specialises in military electronics, including army communications and night-fighting equipment.

Koor and South Africa

Koor's Director-General, Yeshayahu Gavish, said in 1982: "Since we produce arms, we sell them to whoever will buy them." Koor customers are believed to include South Africa, Taiwan, Indonesia, Iran, and repressive regimes in South America such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile and Ecuador.

Koor maintains a permanent representative in South Africa. They

Critics

The Histadrut nevertheless manages to present a progressive image abroad. The Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and many of its affiliates for example, have continued to liaise with the Histadrut on violations of the rights of Palestinian workers and unions. This could be compared to addressing complaints of attacks against Solidanorsc to the

government-sponsored unions in Poland.

But the Histadrut is coming under criticism, at home and abroad, particularly for its relationship with South Africa. It claims to oppose apartheid and has recently announced it is cutting all commercial links with the Botha regime. However, the federation has built up such industrial and trading ties with the South African government (see box) that true disengagement

co-own Iskoor Steel with Iscor, which is controlled by the South African government. This factory, outside Tel Aviv in Israel, produces half of Israel's steel needs, using iron from South Africa. Some of the refined steel goes to European markets under the label 'Made in Israel', in order to beat sanctions.

Koor and the Palestinians

The Histadrut claims that it does not support the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, but the Solel Boneh company and affiliates have been heavily involved in the construction of Jewish settlements there since the mid-1970s. According to Histadrut itself, Solel Boneh has built over one-quarter of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Such settlements are illegal under international laws governing occupation.

In 1983 a small group of Histadrut members tried to block further construction. They brought the issue to a vote in the Executive Committees of the Israeli Labour Party and the Histadrut, but were defeated. Histadrut leaders argued that if they did not build the settlements, someone else would. Government subsidies of the construction contracts in the territories were simply too lucrative for the federation to pass up.

While many Histadrut-owned industries are run as cooperatives, Palestinians are barred from being co-operative members and are employed only as day labourers.

would be extremely difficult.

The Histadrut has called on the South African government to "lift restrictions against Black African leaders" and free trade union detainees, but its closest relationship appears to be with Zulu leader Gatsha Buthelezi, recently hosted by Histadrut's Afro-Asian Institute. Many members of UWUSA, which is linked to Inkatha, have received training from the Histadrut.

The Histadrut has close links with rightwing US organisations and

has received grants from President Reagan's National Endowment for Democracy Fund for its Latin-America Centre's work abroad. But elsewhere in Britain for example, international support for the federation is weakening. Clearly, Palestinian unions hope that as more unions overseas learn about what Histadrut is doing in the Occupied Territories, support for the West Bank and Gaza trade unions will increase.

Strike movement in Nigeria

Workers launch a wave of strikes in Nigeria in spite of attempts by the military regime to control the trade union movement. SHARON PARKER reports. ⁺

Nigerian workers are amongst the most militant in Africa. On May Day 1988 workers were striking all over the country. Lagos international airport was closed. Transport workers went on strike and government officials had difficulty getting to work. Army security was reinforced at government headquarters, at Dodan Barracks and around oil installations. The action on May Day was the culmination of a wave of strike action in Nigeria, which came close to developing into a national general strike.

Workers strike against high prices

The conflict between labour and the military government of Nigeria has been brewing for some time now. The government negotiated to borrow money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Before lending the money, the IMF stipulated that the Nigerian government take measures to 'stabilise' the economy. Generally, the IMF measures would lower workers' standard of living. Amongst other things, the IMF insisted that the government raise the price of oil and petrol by 6%. This would have a ripple effect through the economy, pushing up the prices of virtually all goods.

Workers have been agitating against the IMF interference in the economy and particularly against the 6% price increase. There have been widespread protests against the military government's acceptance of the IMF package.

Students were the first to react against the price increases. Peaceful protests won public sympathy when police took action against protesters. Protests in Jos resulted in six deaths and spread to all eleven states in northern Nigeria. The military government's violent reaction to peaceful protest provoked workers into strike action. On 24 April,

⁺ The writer is a staff member of ILRIG

the government banned all strikes. But workers in banking, health, the civil service and other sectors ignored the ban.

Workers also raised demands about wages. The government was attempting to amend the minimum wage law, so that employers could pay lower wages. The minimum wage law was first passed in 1981, when a national strike forced the government to negotiate minimum wages with the National Labour Congress (NLC). Now, faced with government attempts to change this law, the NLC condemned this move and launched a campaign against lowering the minimum wage.

Riot police take over union offices

The military government responded in March by sacking the executive of the NLC. A unit of fully armed riot police took over the union headquarters. Policemen armed with machine guns guarded the main gates to prevent NLC officials from entering the building. The military government later appointed an administrator to run union affairs and arrange elections for a new NLC executive.

But in spite of the repression, the strikes spread. This was the biggest strike wave since President Ibrahim Babangida came to office in 1985. A showdown between government and the labour movement seemed imminent.

Strikers win some demands

The government had to contain the strike wave and prevent it from reaching national proportions. Eventually the government conceded to the strikers' demands to release strike leaders and not to victimise striking workers and to negotiate over wages. This is a major victory for workers who have faced arbitrary arrests and detentions of their leadership for many years. The government also agreed to withdraw the amendment to the minimum wage law, and promised to negotiate wages with the unions. In a TV interview the Minister of Labour said, "The withdrawal of the amendment upholds the will of the people."

The workers did not win their major demand for an end to the price increases. But it was their organised strength and their willingness to take action that won important concessions from the government.

Government interference in the labour movement

During the 1970s there were four rival trade union federations in Nigeria. In 1978 the military government banned all the federations and established the NLC. This was an attempt to cut union leaders' dependence on funding from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the

World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). It was also designed to sever any foreign influence on union matters. Often trade union leaders had no support from workers, and many had become corrupt.

As in most other post-independent African countries, state-appointed labour federations allow governments tight control over union matters. The Nigerian government claimed the right to appoint the president of the NLC. Moreover, the Nigerian government expects the NLC to prevent strikes and promote economic growth. However, the affiliates managed to gain some control over the NLC by forcing the government to recognise their democratically elected officials on the executive.

The old Nigerian labour federations were traditionally affiliated to either the pro-capitalist ICFTU or the pro-Soviet WFTU. But today the NLC is only affiliated to the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), which aims to promote the building of a continent-wide labour movement.

Despite its support for the coup which led to Babangida becoming president, NLC leaders were subject to police harassment and arrests. Opposition to government proposals have met with harsh repression. When the NLC rallied against the proposed IMF package 16 union leaders, including the NLC president, were detained. The NLC had to resort to court action to ob-

tain the release of its leaders.

Split in NLC leadership

While the working class in Nigeria were facing the onslaught of harsh government economic policies, they were also facing a crisis within the ranks of the NLC. The crisis came to a head on the eve of its official conference.

On the 23 February, one section organised a separate conference attended by 17 of the 42 industrial unions, and elected their own president. This section tried to take over the union building. The split occurred almost exactly ten years after the government imposed the NLC on unions by law.

But their manoeuvre failed, and the federation's old leader, Ali Chiroma, was re-elected president. Chiroma's supporters are considered to be "socialists". The NLC's adoption of a "socialist programme of action" was a possible reason for the split. At the adopting conference held in July 1986, the NLC declared socialism would be the method of overthrowing the military government, and discussed the need for a workers' political party.

No doubt the split has roots in the divisions between the four different federations before the NLC was formed by the government. A further possible cause of the split were corrupt practices such as the inflation of union membership figures.

But whatever the reasons, the

split in the NLC leadership gave the military government the opportunity to implement its harsh economic package.

Government forced to recognise workers' strength

The government-appointed administrator of the NLC has been unable control the militancy and action of the organised working class. The strikers were not able to force the government to withdraw the latest price increases. But forcing the

military government to negotiate wages with the unions is a major victory, granting unions the de facto right to negotiate with the government on matters of economic policies.

Despite the splits in the NLC leadership, the strike wave proved that unions can organise protests which are disciplined and win mass support for their demands. A question which remains is whether the banned NLC leadership will be able to overcome their differences and act on behalf of their members.

Bruised but still kicking

Two years ago a giant new federation of trade unions was formed in El Salvador. DINGA SIKWEBU⁺ describes the struggles and progress of the Salvadorean workers.

In February 1986 a giant was born in El Salvador. The giant is the National Union of Salvadorean Workers (UNTS), a federation of trade union, peasant and student bodies. The birth of this great force marked a new stage in the struggles which are ravaging Salvadorean society.

Since 1979 the Salvadorean government has been locked in a civil war with the Salvadorean liberation movement, the Democratic Revolutionary Front/Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FDR/FMLN). With no end to this civil war in sight, different forces have been working out ways of breaking the stalemate and tipping the balance in their favour.

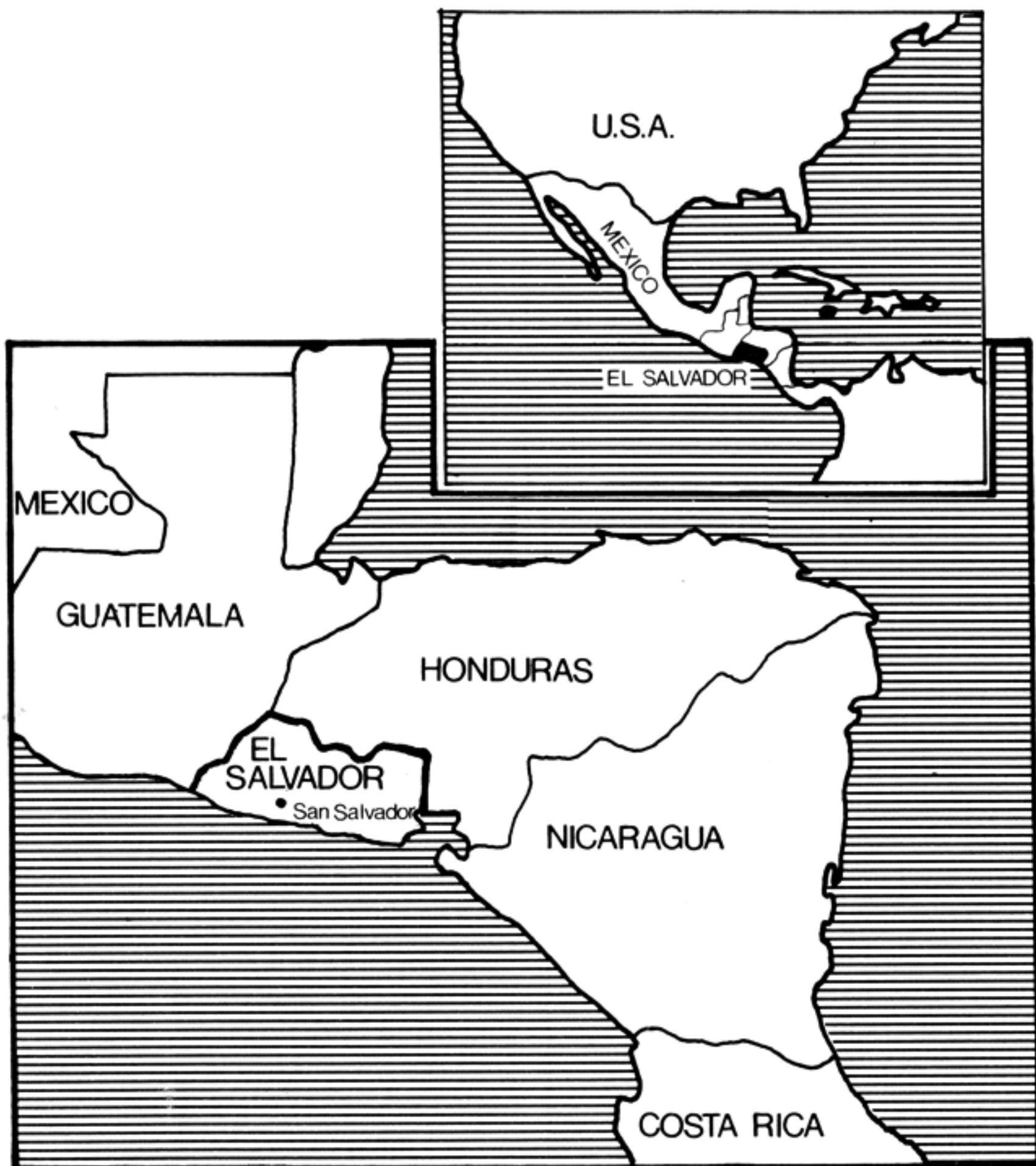
Elected in 1984, and supported by the United States, the Christian Democratic Party government had the task of stopping the civil war. It was elected to mediate between the rightwing oligarchy, a group of four-

teen families who control most of El Salvador's political and economic life, and the progressive forces of the trade unions, people's organisations and FDR/FMLN. But instead of mediating, the Christian Democratic government has found itself isolated and opposed both by the rightwing forces as well as the progressive forces.

The rightwing, which consists of factory bosses and landowners connected to the oligarchy, is supported by the military, which feels the government is soft in dealing with the FMLN guerillas.

In January 1986 the rightwing through their political parties - ARENA and PCN - launched an attack on the Christian Democratic government. The right was protesting against the government's plans of raising taxation for the war effort. These two parties which together hold 27 seats in the 60-seat National

⁺ *The writer is a staff member of International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG)*



Assembly, refused to collaborate with the government. Both adopted a "tight lips and folded arms" strategy as they sat quietly in the Assembly during discussion.

At the same time as this protest, the organisation of employers initiated a "bosses strike" in order to put pressure on the government. The bosses paid workers not to

come to work and managed to shut more than 70% of business enterprises.

The civil war has left about 60 000 dead, more than 5 000 missing, and about 1 million displaced. Despite its claim to represent national unity, the inability, of the Christian Democrats to stop this civil war has created great dissatis-

faction amongst the people. President's Duarte's economic policies have increased the dissatisfaction of both the right and the left. To the workers and the middle classes the raising of food, fuel, transport prices and consumer taxes by between 40-50% is unacceptable.

This jostling by both the left and the right has left the Christian Democratic Party government isolated. Workers, peasants and youth realised that the best manner of taking their struggle forward was through building grassroots organisations. This coincided with a new emphasis on the part of the FDR/FMLN on combining armed action with mass mobilisation.

The giant is born

The birth of UNTS was marked by a 50 000-strong demonstration on 21 February 1986 against the government's economic policies. The new federation is the result of a merger between trade unions, agricultural co-operatives, and student organisations. The trade unions include militant unions from the public and private sector, as well as a federation of unions - the UPD - which is assisted by the American Institute of Free Labour Development (AIFLD), which in turn is closely associated with the CIA and therefore with American imperialism. The UPD supported the Christian Democrats in the 1984 elections, but has since broken with

them over their inability to stop the war.

The agricultural co-operatives that have affiliated with UNTS were also linked to the Christian Democrats, but have distanced themselves from the government since the latter has failed to implement the agrarian reform programme. If implemented, this programme would mean access to more land and credit for the co-ops.

The coming together of these organisations under the umbrella of UNTS presented a powerful weapon in the hands of popular opposition to Duarte's government.

UNTS in action

The activities of UNTS over the last two years have mainly been concentrated on two campaigns - the ending of the civil war and the scrapping of the government's economic strategy.

"Dialog Si, Guerra No!"

"Dialogue Yes, War No!"

This chant can be heard in every UNTS rally. In a conference held in July 1986, three months after its launch, UNTS explicitly called for the government to continue dialogue with the FDR/FMLN. According to UNTS the conflict can only be resolved by establishing a transitional government of national unity which will include all the parties from both sides of the conflict.



'Dialogue Yes! War No!': Peace march, San Salvador, October 1985

Photo: Jenny Matthews/Format

UNTS believes such a transitional government would only be able to end the war, if it was committed to the following:

- * Respect for basic human rights.
- * Granting an amnesty to political prisoners and exiles.
- * The right of those displaced by the war to return to their homes.
- * An investigation of past human rights violations.
- * An end to forced conscription.
- * An end to United States interference in El Salvador.

Salvador is not the only country in Central America which is being torn by civil war. Honduras and Guatemala are experiencing civil wars similar to that in Salvador. In Nicaragua the socialist government of the FSLN is under attack by the rightwing Contras backed by the United States. On 7 August last year the Central America Peace Accord or Esquipulas agreement was signed by Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica. With civil wars raging, the accord is an attempt by the Central American states to establish peace in the region. The accord specifies that foreign troops and military support must be withdrawn from the region. It also demands that the signatories of the accord refuse to allow their countries to be used as springboards in attacks directed at other states in the region. It

demands that in the different states where there is internal conflict a process of reconciliation should be initiated.

Although UNTS supports the regional peace initiative, the Federation questions the sincerity of President Duarte in honouring the Peace Accord in El Salvador. According to Miguel Aleman, an UNTS executive member, the Duarte government signed the Accord as an international publicity stunt.

"Our government signs any document ... especially those they can send out to other nations to show their goodwill. But the truth is that here in practice, the contents of those good documents are used in another way. It is a document that speaks of dialogue with the working class, but in actual fact denies all dialogue with workers."

The doubts expressed by UNTS and its affiliates about Duarte's sincerity are not unfounded. Duarte's approach to honouring the Peace Accord in his country has been characterised by the dragging of feet. After establishing a reconciliation commission staffed by known anti-FDR/FMLN elements, Duarte proposed a meeting for 15 September last year. The invitation to the talks was accompanied by a long list of conditions which included a call for the FMLN to lay down its arms and renounce violence.

When the FDR/FMLN rejected these conditions and argued that

they were against the spirit of the Accord, Duarte called off the talks. The talks were resumed by 4 October without Duarte's conditions, after the intervention of Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias, the architect of the Accord.

UNTS's commitment to the resolution of the conflict has not been confined to resolutions. The Federation has backed its demand for peace by flexing its muscles. UNTS workers were out in their thousands demonstrating outside the venue where the 4-5 October peace negotiations were being held.

"Duarte - we won't pay for your war"

This slogan, which was inscribed in a huge banner at the February 1986 launch of the UNTS, captures the connection that the federation makes between the war and the economic problems of El Salvador. According to one of the leaders of UNTS:

"Duarte knows well that every extra *colon*⁺ that goes to pay the workers is one *colon* less to spend on bullets and bombs ..."

For workers it is clear that taxes and prices are being increased to finance the war, not for bettering their conditions. Since the Duarte government came to power in 1984 the living conditions of workers

have deteriorated. Out of an adult population of 2,4 million only 1,7 million have jobs. Two-thirds of those that have employment are casuals without full-time jobs. Prices have increased dramatically. In March last year the government announced a 45% increase in rice, 66% increase in beans and 35% in maize prices. Besides the war, one of the major problems in El Salvador is finding a place to stay. As a result of the war and poverty in the rural areas, one third of the total population of El Salvador is living in San Salvador, the capital city. The majority of those people are living in squatter camps. The housing problem became worse after the October 1986 earthquake which destroyed a quarter of the few existing houses. As a result of the government's failure to provide health and education facilities, most social services are left to the churches and other relief organisations.

It is the government's failure to respond to these problems that has fuelled the UNTS campaign against Duarte's economic policies. The demands of UNTS are:

- * The scrapping of Duarte's economic policies.
- * An economic reconstruction which will begin to solve the 60% unemployment rate.
- * A decent living wage for all workers.

+ *Colon is the money used in Salvador*

* A fundamental and serious land reform programme which will slow the flow of people to the urban areas.

What is exceptional about UNTS is its determination to back these demands with action. Since its formation, no month has gone by without a massive demonstration. These demonstrations have been in support of the federation's demands. Each demonstration has attracted between 50 000 and 80 000 people.

Solidarity action with striking workers has been one of the weapons used by the UNTS unions. In September 1986 a strike wave shook the country as workers came out demanding higher wages and better working conditions. In the last two years strike activity has increased enormously. In 1986 there were about 150 strikes.

Response to UNTS

The responses to the emergence of the UNTS have not only come from workers; youth, peasants and other groups opposed to the Duarte government, have participated in their thousands in UNTS-led campaigns. Since UNTS's founding there has been a lot of rightwing activity directed at the new federation.

The first government response was to support an initiative to form a counter union to UNTS - the National Union of Rural Workers

(UNOC). The government bussed thousands of peasants to San Salvador for a "March for Peace and Democracy" demonstration on 15 March 1986.

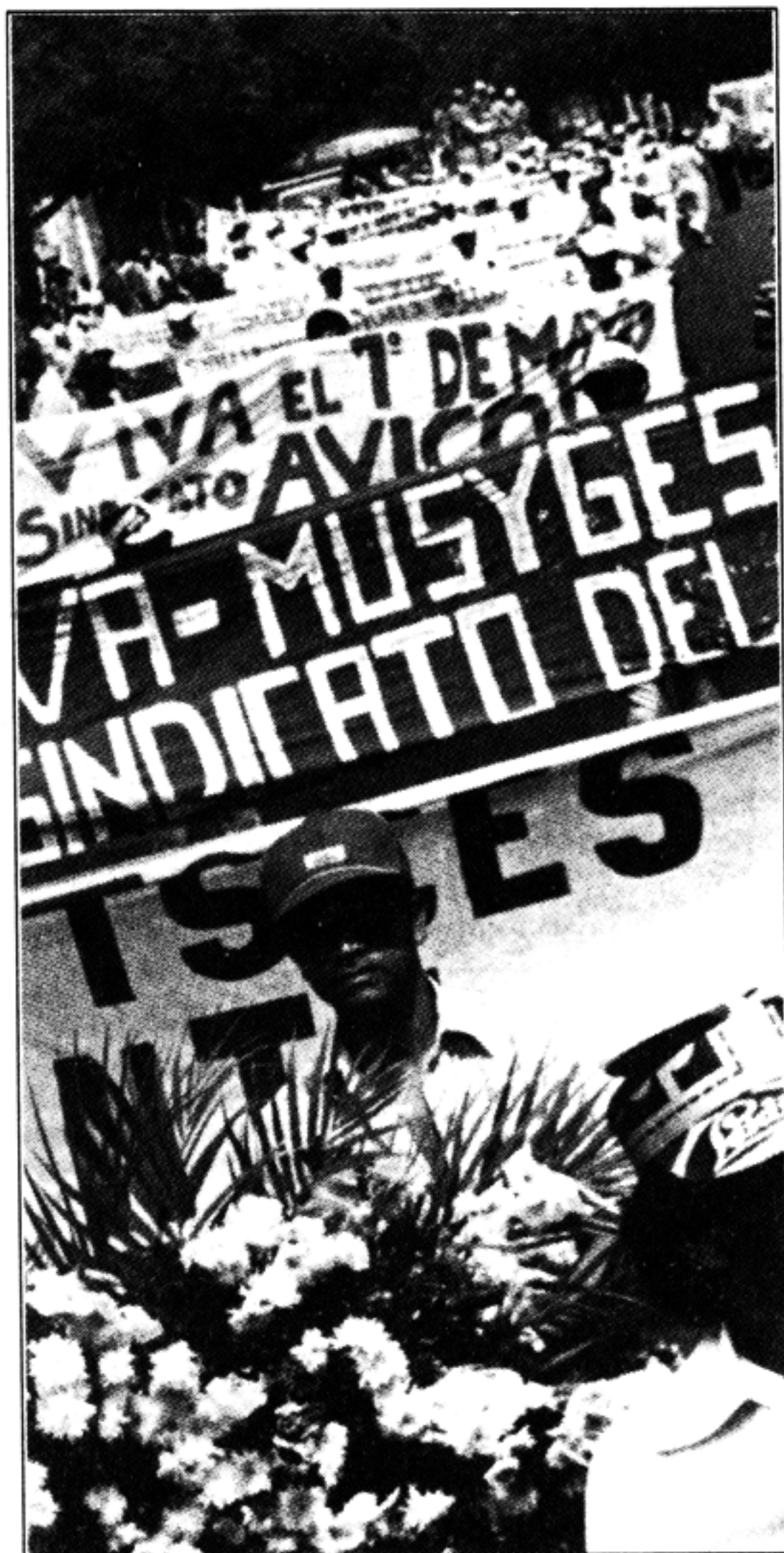
Beside this manipulative response, the State has unleashed its repressive might against UNTS. The persecution of trade unionists is still continuing. In a letter in December 1987 to the Costa Rican President Arias, UNTS mentioned that 18 major human rights violations had occurred since the signing of the Peace Accord on 7 August. These violations have involved arrests of union activists. Union members have also been targets of kidnappings and death squads. As recently as 18 December, a death squad shot and killed Medadro Ayala, an activist of the telecommunications union - AST-TEL, a few metres from the police headquarters in San Salvador. The majority of the 700 political prisoners in El Salvador are union activists.

Strike action is still considered illegal. Although the 1983 Salvadorean constitution allows workers to form trade unions, this right has been severely undermined over the last two years. In most cases workers are locked out or arbitrarily transferred. Their strikes and demonstrations are broken up by the police and the army. In July last year the police opened fire on striking hospital workers, wounding fifteen of them. Settlements that have been agreed are ignored and

militant unions are being replaced with sweetheart and pro-government unions.

The main target of these attacks has been the unions in the public sector. The government is using the 1962 labour code which denies public sector workers the right to form unions. The government has also used a law which allows government departments to transfer public sector workers arbitrarily. These laws have been used to break the power of unions in the public sector. ASTTEL - the telecommunication union has been a victim of these union-bashing practices. In August 1987, the State, which controls the telephone company, decided to break the agreement which they had signed with ASTTEL. The police invaded the workplace and management refused to meet with the worker leaders. Management has meanwhile met with a sweetheart union which has 30 members rather than with ASTTEL which has more than 4880 members.

The government has consistently accused UNTS of being a front for FDR/FMLN. This accusation is backed by the U.S. embassy in San Salvador. Two days before the 1986 UNTS May Day gathering



May First Committee, founding member of UNTS, on the march

Photo: Jenny Matthews/Format

which attracted about 80 000 people, the AIFLD in a press conference produced documents allegedly captured from the FMLN guerillas proving the link between the guerilla movement and UNTS. This accusation is the suspected reason for the withdrawal of one federation nine months after the launch. A leaked U.S. Embassy memorandum implicates AIFLD in efforts to divide UNTS. The views expressed about UNTS in the memorandum were not different from the reasons given by the UPD for its withdrawal. Both claimed that the UNTS was being political. The involvement of AIFLD was again cited after a faction broke away from the 30 000 strong National Peasants Association (ANC) which is affiliated to UNTS.

These attacks on the labour movement have been countered by militant action from workers. On 7 July 1986 a union leader in the textile union, Febe Elisabeth, was arrested. A wave of strikes in 19 factories followed her arrest, with the action culminating in a massive demonstration. On 12 July, after the intervention of President Duarte, she was released. The release of another union activist, Celso Antonio Rivas of COACES, on 1 December was secured by a march of 5 000 people to the presidential residence.

The future of UNTS

UNTS faces many challenges. Its ability to beat back the attack directed at workers and remain a fighting organisation depends on many factors. The future of UNTS depends on the development of the struggle in El Salvador. But the struggle in El Salvador is closely tied to the struggles and wars in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Moreover, Central America is on the doorstep of that imperialist monster, the United States. Any attempt to establish peace without effectively stopping U.S. intervention will leave the way open for rightwing coups, military dictatorship and civil war.

All of these national, regional and international factors will define the options open to UNTS. But UNTS is not simply a pawn of regional and international forces. Already UNTS has taken great steps in the struggle of the workers to decide their future. Together with other progressive forces in El Salvador, in other countries in the region, and in the U.S., UNTS has the potential to play a big role in resolving the war which ravages the country. Its role in this process will determine the future of the working people of El Salvador.

Confrontation shows Salvadorean government is taking stronger action against unions

Trade unionists occupy the Ministry of Labour, demanding an increase in minimum wages and freedom for trade unions. JULIA SHIPP reports⁺.

A confrontation between Salvadorean unionists and the Minister of Labour is the most recent evidence that the government of El Salvador is taking stronger measures against the growing labour movement in that country. The confrontation also showed that the Salvadorean labour movement, and its allies in U.S. labour, will not stand idly by in the face of government attacks.

On March 10, 60 Salvadorean workers forcibly entered the Ministry of labour in San Salvador. The

workers, who are members of the National Union of Salvadorean Workers (UNTS), were demanding: a raise in the minimum wage; effective control of the prices of basic necessities; respect for the freedom of unions and an end to the massive firings of workers; the demilitarization of many workplaces; and solutions to ongoing labour conflicts. The UNTS is a broad coalition that includes most of the progressive Salvadorean unions and many student and community organisations.

When the workers entered the Ministry, labour Minister Lazaro Tadeo Bernal refused to meet with them. Instead, he declared the action an "occupation" and summoned his bodyguards.

With the help of the guards, Bernal fled the building, escaping to a nearby military installation. In the process, the Minister was bruised and cut on the face, Bernal claims that he was attacked by five workers. The workers deny this and say that he was hit by a chair thrown by one of his own guards.

The Ministry was then surrounded by armed soldiers and the airforce, leaving the workers trapped. Later that afternoon, Salvadorean President Jose Napoleon Duarte and labour Minister Bernal ordered the arrest of five of the workers involved in the action. The five

⁺ This article is reprinted from *Labor Notes*, No. 110, May 1988

are leaders of hospital, banking, textile and confectionery unions.

The UNTS tried to arrange a way out of the building for the trapped workers so that they would not be captured or attacked. It organised about 70 more workers to go the Ministry in the hope that all the workers together would form a group large enough to put off an attack.

However, this second group was stopped by the airforce, searched, and beaten. Humberto Centeno, general secretary of the telecommunications workers union, ASTTEL, and a UNTS executive committee member, was severely beaten. He was charged with "assaulting a security officer", but eyewitnesses - including a delegation of U.S. citizens - have stated that the attack on Centeno was unprovoked.

Tortured

Centeno was taken to airforce headquarters where he was apparently tortured. Although in critical condition, he was then taken to a hospital under heavy armed guard.

Despite the dispersal of the sec-

ond group of workers, the group inside the Ministry managed to negotiate a bus and finally leave the Ministry accompanied by Archbishop Rosa Chavez.

On March 11, between two and three thousand workers marched in San Salvador to demand Centeno's release and to reiterate their demands of the previous day. The U.S. labour and solidarity movements also responded to the attack on Centeno with letters and protests. A second march took place the following day.

On March 12, although unable to leave his hospital bed, Centeno was freed and charges against him were dropped.

But the story does not end here. There are still orders to arrest the five unionists involved in the action at the Ministry. These unionists are trying to build support and arrange for the orders to be rescinded. The UNTS is also planning more protests in order to protect the unionists and to press for the workers' demands.

Until there are labour and human rights in El Salvador, the story will not end.

Economic Notes

All Economic Notes are by Labour Research Services, Cape Town

Company Profile: Tiger Oats

Tiger Oats is a part of the biggest group of food companies in South Africa and is itself a very large food company. It is the biggest producer of:

Mealie Meal	("Ace"; "Induna")
Rice	("Tastic")
Pasta	("Fattis & Monis")
Peanut Butter :	("Black Cat")
Oats	("Jungle")
Grain Sorghum :	("King Korn")
Animal feeds	("Meadow"; "Dogmor")
Nuts	("Star"; "Planters")

It is also a major producer of:

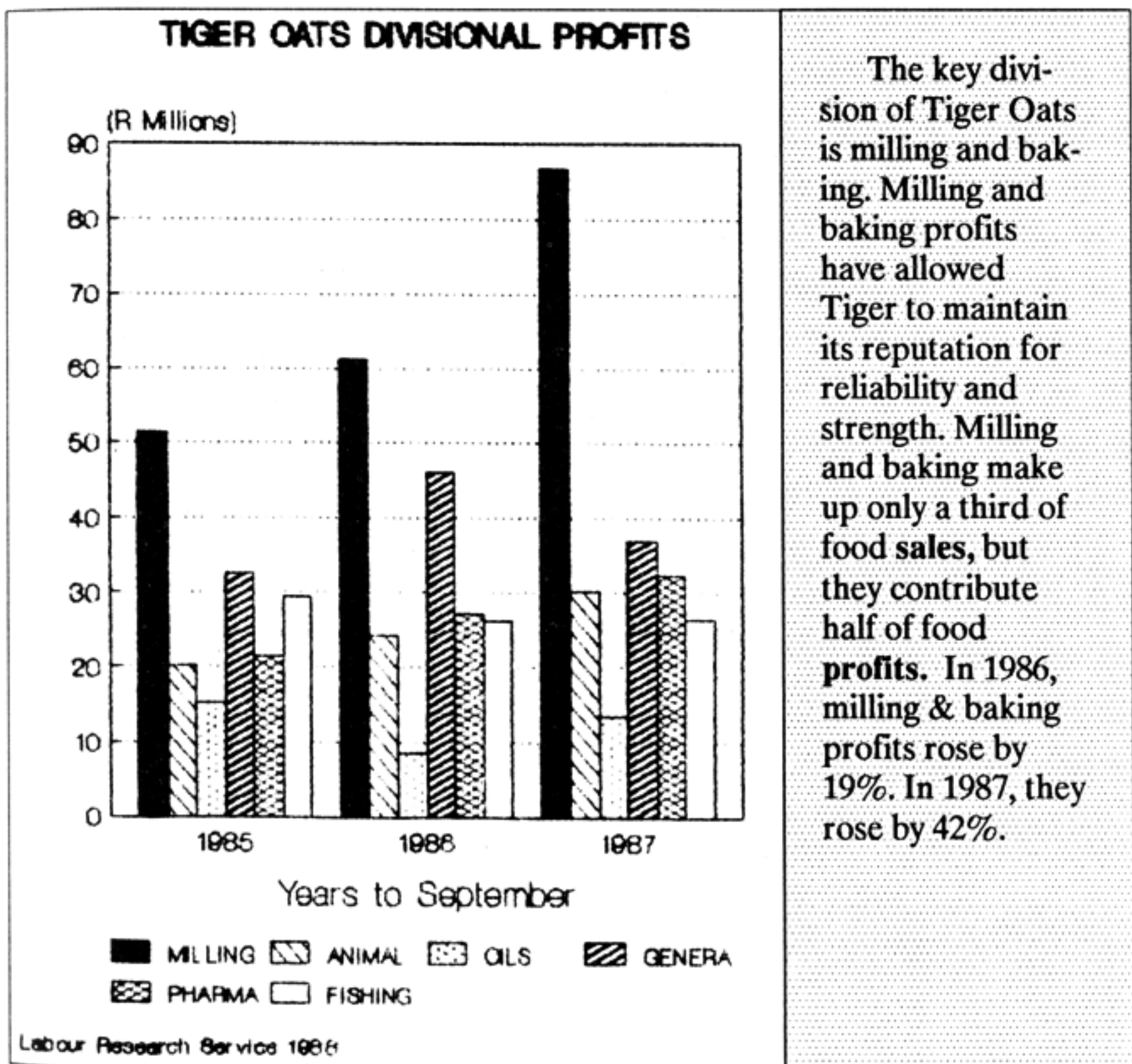
Bread	("Albany")
Flour	("Golden Cloud"; "Record")
Eggs	("Golden Lay")
Margarine	("Golden Spread"; "Sunshine D")
Vegatable oils:	("Edib"; "Black Cat")
Chickens	("County Fair")

Tiger owns Oceana Fishing ("Glenryck"; "Lucky Star") and the pharmaceutical company Adcock Ingram. Tiger is known as a solid, reliable company which has produced excellent results for its shareholders. Tiger has produced much better results over the last five years than its arch rival, the Premier Group. (See next report.)

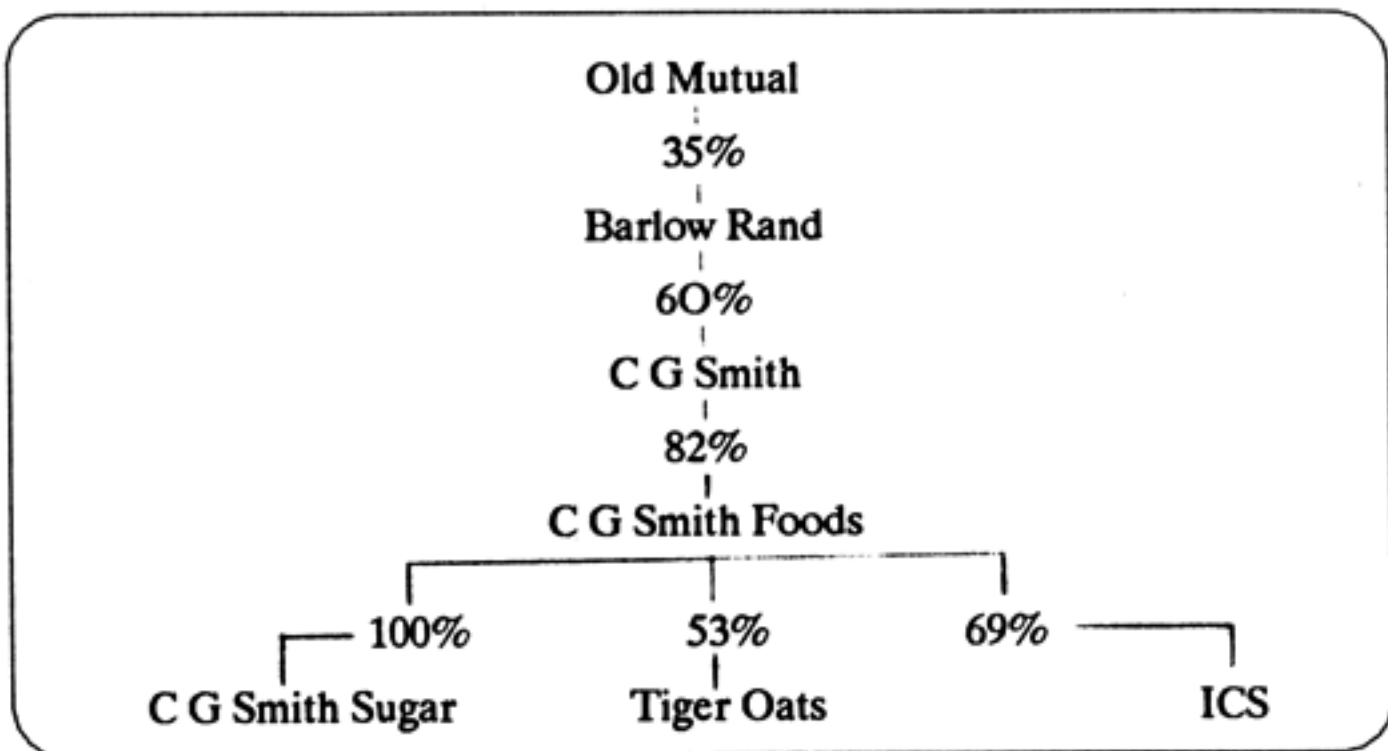
Since 1982, earnings per share have grown by 20% every year, well in advance of inflation.

	1987	% increase on 1986
Total sales	R4 119 m	+ 17%
Profit before tax	R 239 m	+ 20%
Tax	R 91 m	+ 19%
Dividends	R 47 m	+ 25%
Profit kept by Tiger	R 89 m	+ 19%

Tiger Oats directors are paid an average weekly fee of R2200.



Tiger Oats is part of the Barlow Rand Group, the biggest industrial holding company in South Africa.



**May there always be
good food
on your table**



**Almost every-
time you eat,
Tiger tastes
the profit.**

Company profile : The Premier Group

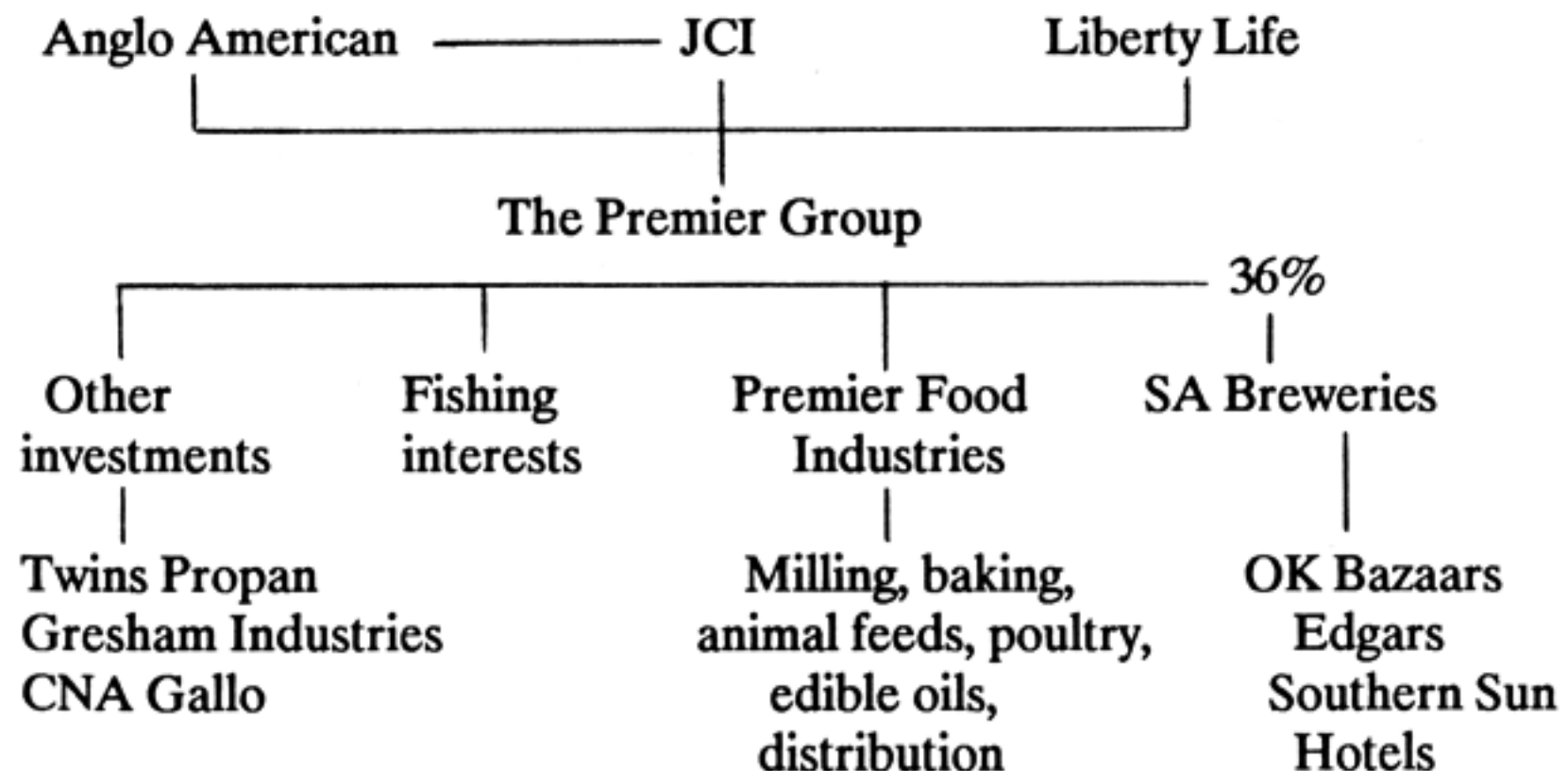
Premier is the biggest producer of flour and bread. ("Snowflake" and "Blue Ribbon").

It is also a major producer of:

Mealie meal:	"Impala"; "Iwisa"
Grain sorghum:	"Jabula"
Animal feeds:	"Epol"
Eggs:	"Nulaid"; "Farmer Brown"
Chickens:	"Farmer Brown"
Margarine:	"Blossom"; "Kraft"
Vegetable oil:	"Epic"; "Pan"
Peanut butter:	"Yum-Yum"

It has investments in CNA Gallo, Twins Propan and Gresham Industries. Also, Premier is the major shareholder in S.A. Breweries.

Premier was started many years ago by the Bloom family. Today it is ultimately controlled by Anglo American.



Bad Results

Premier produced bad results for shareholders in 1985 and 1986 because it had to pay much of its profit to banks.

In 1987, results were much better. Earnings for shareholders rose by 55% in the year to March 1987 and then by 50% in the following six months. Dividends were raised for the first time since 1983.

	1987	% change
Total sales	R2 623 m	+ 17%
Interest paid to banks	R56 m	- 26%
Earnings for shareholders	R148 m	+ 55%
Dividends	R69 m	+ 34%
Profit kept by Premier	R69 m	+ 145%

Premier has sometimes made strong political statements. For example, they have "advocated the need for urgent negotiations with credible black leaders, including those in jail or exile, on the issue of political power sharing."

Tony Bloom, a director of Premier⁺, even went to visit the ANC in Lusaka.

He warned shareholders that "there is already a disturbing trend among blacks to equate the free enterprise system with apartheid, and to therefore regard it as unacceptable.

Bloom has promised shareholders "another reasonable increase in earnings" in 1988. Although this is dependent on "reasonable labour relationships".

85% of the workers in Premier Group companies are union members. There are twenty unions which are recognised by Premier.

The minimum wages negotiated at Premier Foods companies in 1987 varied from R103 per week to R160 per week.

Meanwhile, Premier directors earn the highest average fee in the food sector - R2379 per week.

"There is probably not a home in South Africa in which a Premier product cannot be found." This is because Premier is one of the country's major food manufacturers.

⁺ *Tony Bloom has emigrated to the United Kingdom.*

Inflation

Area	Consumer Price Index (1985 = 100)	Annual rate of inflation (% increase over 1 year)
	May 1988	May 1988
Cape Town	152.9	12.1%
Port Elizabeth	154.1	11.9%
East London	149.3	11.9%
Durban	146.1	12.2%
Pietermaritzburg	149.8	12.5%
Witwatersrand	154.0	13.2%
Vaal Triangle	151.3	11.8%
Pretoria	159.8	14.1%
Klerksdorp	161.9	14.9%
Bloemfontein	143.1	10.6%
OFS Goldfields	156.4	14.5%
Kimberley	150.5	13.2%
SOUTH AFRICA	153.1	12.9%

(Source: Central Statistical Services)

The annual rate of inflation in May 1988 fell to 12.9%, compared with 13.3% in April.

While economists predict price rises will intensify in the second half of the year, the annual rate of inflation is now expected to hold below 14% in 1988 as a whole.

Cape Employer's Association finds reds under bed

A Labour Research Services report

Astonishing information about employers' anti-union activities has come to light in a recent issue of the Cape Employers' Association's newsletter which is headed "Confidential: to top management."

It reveals that a meeting with the Minister of Law and Order, Mr. A. J. Vlok, is to be held, and gives information from a seminar addressed by former police spy, Michael Morris. He runs the Terrorism Research Centre, which seems to have close links with his former employers. He outlined alleged ANC advice to unions to build up their finances so that strikes can last longer; for "workers' defence teams" to be organised to deal with scabs; and to refuse to work overtime to prevent employers from stockpiling goods.

The Association also has a "radio-backed network" for co-ordination of information during periods of unrest. The main base in Epping/Athlone/Ndabeni was pre-

viously provided by Afrox; the newsletter tells us that COIN Security have taken over this function.

Labour Research Service mentioned

The newsletter gives the Labour Research Service a backhanded compliment. In an article headed "COSATU steps up activity in the Cape Peninsula", the writer says that "individual employers faced with union demands have no source of information comparable to the Labour Research Service." The Association goes on to suggest a sharing of information on union demands to be co-ordinated by the Association.

With enemies like that, who needs friends.

Warning to trade unionists..

Deregulation threat in Philippi

If you have members in Philippi, Cape, be warned: the "energetic Philippi Industrialists' Association is pressing for special concession to open up more badly needed jobs in their area". Special concessions mean deregulation and removal of minimum wages, of course. This has already happened in Kew, Johannesburg.

This is revealed in the newsletter of the Cape Employers' Association in their December issue. Watch the Government Gazette for further developments!

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South African Labour Bulletin Publication Guidelines

The South African Labour Bulletin is a journal which supports the democratic labour movement in South Africa. It is a forum for analysing, debating and recording the aims and activities of this movement. To this end, it requires contributors to the Bulletin to conform to the following publication guidelines:

1 Constructive criticism of unions or federations is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.

2 Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

- *analytical articles* 8000 words
- *debate, reviews, documents, reports* 5000 words
- *briefings* 1000 words

3 *Articles* should be submitted in a final and correct form and in duplicate. Some articles may be refereed where necessary; all articles may be edited by the Bulletin. In the event of the editors deciding that other than minor editing changes are required, the article will be referred back to the author.

4 *Briefings* should cover topical events and developments of concern

to the democratic labour movement. They should be easy to understand and keep footnotes and references to a minimum.

5 *Debate, reviews, reports and documents* are intended:

- to make important statements and information from the labour movement more widely available;
- for reviewing new literature or other material of relevance to labour;
- to make more in-depth reports and research available to readers;
- to allow for debate on important contemporary issues.

6 Contributions should be written in clear, understandable language.

7 Contributions to the Bulletin must be typed and, where applicable, include proper footnoting and references.

8 Except in the case of public documents, all material submitted will be treated in confidence.

9 The editors reserve the right to recommend to the author of any material that it be placed under another category to that under which it was submitted.

**For more details, please
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