

South African

LABOUR BULLETIN

May 1990 Volume 14 Number 8

Interview with SACP's Joe Slovo



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The South African Labour Bulletin

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Published since April 1974

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South African
**LABOUR
 BULLETIN**

Volume 14 Number 8 May 1990

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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articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.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 and debates* 10 000 words
- *reviews, documents, reports* 5 000 words
- *briefs* 500 words
- *letters* 500 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 *Briefs* cover topical events and developments of concern to the democratic labour movement. They would usually appear under *Labour Action* or *Broadly Speaking*

5 *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.

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.

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Editorial Notes

May Day

The organised working class and the mass movement more generally can congratulate themselves. For the first time in many decades May Day has been accepted by the government as a public holiday.

The struggle for May Day began in the early 80s, with rallies and education about May Day. In negotiations with management unions began to table demands for a paid holiday on 1 May. In 1986 the first May Day stayaway was staged. A massive success, it reflected the developing alliance between COSATU and the UDF in the context of intensifying political struggle. In the following three years the government played around with a shifting 'workers day' which gave workers a *de facto* May Day while trying to pretend it was something else. Finally this year the government bowed to the inevitable. Workers won their day.

May Day has always symbolised workers' aspirations for a better world. This is even more true now, with the first meeting between the ANC and the government on 2 May. May Day rallies discussed negotiations, nationalisation and a future South Africa.

Features

Recent months have seen an unprecedented wave of strikes and marches among public sector workers. The public sector is generally weakly organised. Hopefully the current wave of action will change this. This *Bulletin* focuses on these workers and their struggles.

Agricultural workers are even more weakly organised than workers in the public sector. Ball's article analyses the increasing domination of agribusiness in farming, and argues for a strategic and

planned approach to building a union base on the farms.

We also publish an in-depth interview with Joe Slovo, as a follow-up to publication of his paper, *Has socialism failed?* two editions ago. *Labour Bulletin* will continue to carry debate on this question.

Real wages falling?

Several readers have questioned the statement, in Renee Roux's article on the Living Wage Campaign in the last edition of *Labour Bulletin*, that real wages are falling. The cover also showed real wages falling while the cost of living rises. Readers pointed out that LRS figures published in the same edition indicate a modest increase in real wages, and that we have no evidence for our assertion.

We were wrong. According to the LRS survey and a bigger government survey covering roughly half the economically active population, wages have increased relative to the CPI inflation index. Sectors excluded from the survey are mineworkers, farmworkers and domestic workers. Last year most mineworkers received an increase just above the inflation rate.

We apologise for an unsubstantiated and loose usage of the term 'real wages'.

However in a different sense we were right. The stagnation of the economy means that more people are dependent on fewer breadwinners. Most observers agree that unemployment is increasing.

Last year the population grew by about 2,5%, while economic growth lagged behind at 1,2%. These factors suggest that, despite slightly increased real wages, the standard of living of workers is not increasing. ☆

Letters to the Bulletin

KwaZulu Finance Corporation expresses concern

Dear Sir,

I refer to the article by Layla Soni, entitled 'Isithebe: Hell for Workers' which appeared in the *South African Labour Bulletin*, November 1989, Volume 14 Number 5.

There are two allegations in the article referring to the KFC which are cause for grave concern on the part of the KFC.

The first is your bald allegation that organised resistance and COSATU's presence in Isithebe are being rigorously challenged, by an alliance of the KFC, UWUSA and the majority of managements.

It is our conviction and a firm policy of this organisation that the balance towards which the entire industrial relations process is striving, should not be distorted by influences that do not belong in that process. The KFC believes that any involvement on its part in this process, in whatsoever manner, would be logistically and morally wrong and would prejudice the industrial relations process.

This aforesaid allegation is most disturbing as the KFC has, at all times, made a point of distancing itself from the issue of industrial relations between the employers active in its industrial estates and organised labour and I must therefore call upon you to either substantiate this allegation, or to retract it unreservedly.

The second issue of concern relates to comments made on the eviction of COSATU from KFC premises, which appear on page 76 of the *Bulletin*.

The relevant paragraph reads: "After this meeting the KFC sent COSATU a letter evicting them from their premises, which were owned by the KFC. ACTWUSA took the KFC to court, winning temporary occupation of the offices. The lease has since expired."

The statement is misleading, in that it states that ACTWUSA took the KFC to court and, moreover implies that the KFC acted unlawfully. This is not true. The KFC was the applicant and acted within its legal rights at all times. It is also incorrect to state that the lease expired after ACTWUSA won temporary occupation of the offices. The temporary occupation granted to the Union on an interim basis was only granted after the lease has already expired.

On 14 December 1987, the KFC entered into a lease agreement with Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union for a period of six months with effect from 1 December 1987. The lease clearly stated that the termination date was 31 May 1988 and that there was to be no automatic right of renewal. When the lease was due to expire, the Union was informed that it would not in fact be renewed and was requested to vacate on the agreed termination date. The following is the correct version of events:

When the Union failed to vacate the leased premises, the KFC, on 9 June 1988, brought an *ex parte* application in the Magistrate's Court in the District of Eshowe, applying for the eviction of the Union. This application was granted.

Subsequently the Union brought an interim application, applying for temporary

reinstatement in the premises, until the matter could be heard finally. This interim application was granted, but when the final order was made, the Magistrate again made an order evicting the Union from the premises.

This order was taken on appeal by the Union and the appeal was dismissed.

The above facts are a matter of public record and could have been easily ascertained from a reading of the relevant court papers.

We must place on record that we take the strongest exception to what we can only regard as a misleading distortion of the truth and which, in our view, could well amount to defamation. In the circumstances and whilst we must naturally reserve our rights in regard to the matter, it would be appreciated if you would take whatever steps are necessary to set the record straight.

Yours faithfully
Marius Spies

We apologise if there are factual inaccuracies in our correspondent's account of the eviction of the unions from KFC offices. However, KFC disputes the facts surrounding the evic-

tion, not the fact that the eviction occurred. It is the latter fact that has led unions to suspect an 'anti-union alliance' between KFC and employers. Unfortunately our correspondent has not been contactable. We are trying to ascertain the views of the unions concerned.

French union federation finds *Bulletin* valuable

Dear friends,

I wish to insist upon the interest we granted to the 7 copies we already received, and most specially to the one published in February. Your *Bulletin* really represents for us an important and appreciable source of information about evolution and discussions which are still going on within the South African trade union movement. It gives us the possibility to be usefully informed as well as to better our knowledge of problems met by the Southern African workers in such a changeable and specific situation. In fact this *Bulletin* will certainly participate in developing our solidarity.
Comradely yours
Denis Jacquot

**International Department
Confederation Francaise
Democratique du Travail
(CFDT)**

A student's tribute to the struggle

Dear comrade,

If an election is held with little change in people's economic circumstance, and they continue to face retrenchment, unemployment, hunger and very often death, then the oppressed would be compelled to sacrifice more of their children. The red flag will always fly in outrage - it is always the cry of the importance of people, the past, the present and the future.

The trade union movement and the mass democratic movement have built their organisations to a formidable strength. The mass marches of the broad front have shown the will of the masses.

Thank you for the informative magazine. It is truly a voice-piece of the workers and all politically conscious people of this strife-torn country.

Erin Mountain
Cape Town

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Labour Action



Demanding reinstatement - SACWU members carry dismissed colleague on their shoulders outside AECI head office

Photo: Morice Smithers/Labour Bulletin

Racism in a liberal environment - again!

Once again an AECI plant has been brought to a halt by racial tension between white and black workers (see Labour Action in previous edition). Tension centres on a fight between a black worker and a white worker. About 1 800 striking SACWU members, some wearing ANC t-shirts, crowded outside the plush offices of the chemical giant, AECI, to lodge a petition with company MD Mike Sanders. The workers had been on strike for a month, demanding the reinstatement of Mr Mphuti, who had been dismissed for allegedly assaulting a white worker, Mr McLachlin. They also demanded that AECI live up to its liberal image, and conduct a full investigation into the rising incidence of white racist violence at the company.

SACWU general-secretary, Humphrey Ndaba, says that on 15 March, a foreman saw a "scuffle"

break out between Mphuti and McLachlin, at the AECI's Midland factory in Sasolburg. Mphuti was immediately suspended. Six days later, white workers who belonged to the right-wing Mynwerkers Unie went on strike, demanding the dismissal of Mphuti. The union believes the strike was instigated by the neo-fascist AWB, who have also been instigating action against black mineworkers in the mines.

On 22 March, Mphuti was dismissed after a disciplinary enquiry found him guilty of assault. McLachlin was transferred to another department. An appeal against the dismissal failed. On the 23rd 1 760 workers went on strike.

Ndaba says that black workers regularly endured racist assaults from white workers in the past, and no action was taken. The AECI management was taking the side of the white workers, he claims, because it feared industrial action by them. They were mostly skilled fitters, whereas black workers were mainly unskilled, and more easily replaceable.



Bokkie Botha addresses the striking workers, with translation help from the workers' leader

*Photo: Morice Smithers/
Labour Bulletin*

Hundreds of workers held up copies of the company's rule book and its publication, *Towards 2002*, to emphasise the claim that AECI was 'breaking its own rules'. The company commits itself to "treat all people with equal dignity and respect", but the workers claim that middle and lower management do not share those ideals. In fact, some managers were clearly neo-fascist, and were members of the AWB.

AECI's Bokkie Botha eventually came down to address the workers, and promised to present their demands to the Managing Director. He told *Labour Bulletin* the company had done all it can to resolve the dispute. The disciplinary enquiry was held according to rules which the union had accepted. The company has offered to submit the assault incident to arbitration, but the union rejects this.

The company has since agreed to re-employ Mputhi outside the Midlands factory,

provided he undergoes five months rehabilitation for drug addiction. This concession by management sparked off a strike amongst white workers.

PPWAWU: many long strikes

There has been a massive increase in industrial action over the first three months of this year compared to last year, according to consultants Levy, Piron and Associates. The paper and wood sector was hardest hit, with 25% of the total 500 000 plus person-days lost through strikes. Last year only 140 000 person-days were lost in the same period.

PPWAWU - one of the smaller COSATU affiliates - says one reason for the high proportion of strikes in their sector is the timing of their wage negotiations compared to other unions. PPWAWU has not only been involved in a high number of strikes (17 between January and the end of March) but also in very long wage strikes.

In many of these workers returned to work with little or no improvement on management's wage offer. Most of the companies were owned by paper giants Mondi (owned by Anglo) and SAPPI (owned by Gencor).

□ The seven-week strike by some 1 000 workers at four Mondi board mills ended with no improvement on management's wage offer. Workers did, however, win an extended backdating of the

increase, an increased bonus, and the replacement of all regional agreements with Mondi board division by the national agreement.

- The wage strike by 300 workers at Mondi's hi-tech Richards Bay paper mill ended after 7 weeks. Workers did not win any improvement on management's final offer.
- Some 1 000 workers at SAPPI's Ngodwana paper mill downed tools over wages. After 6 weeks they returned to work without any improvement in management's final offer.
- At SAPPI's Enstra mill in Springs 1 000 workers struck work for 7 weeks. Workers resumed work with an agreement to send the wage dispute to arbitration.
- About 150 workers at two Mondi paper waste plants - in Alrode and Tulisa Park - took part in a 7 week wage strike. They went back with no improvement on management's offer. One hundred-and-fifty workers at Mondiply Boksburg also struck for 8 weeks over wages. Although they won an improvement the union expects the plant to be closed soon.
- PPWAWU members at Mondi Bruply in Stellenbosch and Elgin downed tools in a legal wage strike. Four hundred-and-seventy workers stayed out for 6 weeks.

Six-week old wage strikes at Leonard Brush on the West Rand (150 workers) and Lion Match in Natal (300 workers) are continuing.

The strikes were all legal wage strikes, and workers were not dismissed.

PPWAWU general secretary Siphon Kubheka says that the long strikes are a "trial of strength" determined more by political factors than wages. On the one hand, "management attitude has hardened. They are taking the offensive against the labour movement now, so that they will still be in command in a post-apartheid South Africa. It is a struggle for the future, not just the present. They are trying to demoralise and demobilise the workers."

On the other hand, Kubheka says, "Workers see companies making massive profits, but refusing decent increases. Workers realise it is a power struggle. The unbannings of organisations and release of leaders have created high expectations. Workers believe the situation should also change at the workplace, but it doesn't. Their standard of living is falling, and treatment is the same."

Kubheka also says that, although workers have often made no gains after a protracted strike, they do not see this as a defeat. "Workers go back to work *toyi-toying*. The attitude of management teaches us that workers have to prepare themselves and *build* the strike beforehand." He advises other unions to expect

protracted strikes, and to prepare materially and psychologically for this.

The PPWAWU strikes reflect a trend of increasing labour militancy and longer strikes. This is likely to continue through the year, given the political climate. This trend is also consistent with the view of many COSATU activists that the move towards negotiations demands a stepping up of mass organisation and mobilisation, rather than a cooling off.

Women in the front: the anti-LRA march

"Women organised this march because we could see that things were becoming bad without women. Women want also to be free," said one of the women at the anti-LRA protest. More than 3000 marchers, the majority of whom were women, gathered outside St. Mary's Church, in De Villiers street, central Johannesburg, on Saturday morning, 28 April. A union official presented an update on the negotiations with the employers organisation SACCOLA.

Toyi-toying and singing throughout the march, the crowd exuded an air of excitement and energy. "We are the traffic officers of the future!" called out a marshal as the traffic was halted at the onset of the march. First stop was the Department of Manpower which had, as expected, shut down for the morning. Mar-

chers continued to the Jeppe Police Station where they were received by grim-faced police officials. The latter were quite obviously unimpressed with John Vorster Square's suggestion that, since their station commander would not be in, they march on Jeppe instead to present the memorandum of demands.

There was general consensus that the march was a great success. Although the crowd was smaller than expected, due to a major transport hitch, it had achieved its aim.

The march was part of the broader campaign against the LRA, but included extra demands from the women. Some of the demands were:

- Fair labour legislation for domestic, farm and public sector workers
- The right to picket, protest and strike
- Work for all at a living wage
- Centralised bargaining
- National health services for all
- An end to privatisation
- A public enquiry into state violence
- Scrapping of the death penalty and the release of all workers on death row
- An immediate end to apartheid.

It was a significant event in that it was initiated, co-ordinated and led by women. As one of the office bearers on the planning committee said: "We've got men who are in this march, but what we are saying is: it is initiated by women. Now is the time that women should stand up and



From a photo by Dawn Norton

fight for their rights together with our male comrades." Male comrades were enthusiastically involved, to the point that Refiloe Ndzuta, one of the organisers, said at the beginning of the march: "We are not saying that our male comrades must not be here. But comrades, women must try to be more in the front!"

The idea for marches against the LRA arose out of a COSATU National Education Committee (NEDCOM) women's sub-committee workshop on 3 February this year, and announced at the joint UDF/COSATU women's workshop in March. The idea was that all the regions would organise anti-LRA women's marches. These would be organised at a local level through women's forums, and the local anti-LRA committees. Community and political organisations, including the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW), Southern Transvaal Youth Congress, UDF and ANC, were invited to support the marches. The Wits and Northern Transvaal regions

were ready to go ahead with the march, but the Northern Transvaal march was interdicted.

The LRA was used as an issue around which to mobilise women to participate in their unions. As one of the officials said: "As women we are also affected by the LRA. For instance, we have a lot of women in the domestic and farm areas, and the law doesn't cover them. So we demand legislation to cover such people. It is also important that we motivate the women to come forward, to take up leadership, to be active in the union, and in the organisation as a whole."

Unions and SACCOLA reach agreement

As *Labour Bulletin* was going to press COSATU and NACTU reached interim agreement with SACCOLA over proposals to revise the LRA. This is a major breakthrough. The proposals are to

be sent to the Minister of Manpower so that they can be placed before parliament this session. Final agreement will be signed on 7 May pending response from two major SACCOLA affiliates, Transnet and the SA Chamber of Business Affiliates in Durban.

The agreement accommodates most of the unions' objections to the current LRA. A last minute attempt by SACCOLA to revise the draft proposals, which were drawn up by a joint legal team, was rejected.

Talks with SACCOLA over the last two years show a trail of stalling tactics, broken promises and obvious reluctance to accommodate the unions' view. How do we explain the sudden turn-around by the employers?

Obviously the sustained anti-LRA campaign, and the increasing combativity of workers have played a role.

But it is probably not a coincidence that employers began to negotiate seriously after 2 February. The unbanning of the ANC and SACP, and the move towards negotiations, opened up an entirely new perspective - a non-racial South Africa governed by the ANC in the not-too-distant future. Workers would clearly be a major constituency of an ANC government, and employers would no longer be able to avoid workers' demands for a new industrial relations system. Major employers probably believe that it is better to start establishing a fairer system now, and try to head off more radical changes in future. ☆



Focus on the public sector

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Fort Hare by *Labour Bulletin correspondent*

University of Natal by *Black Students' Society, UND*

Public sector march in Johannesburg Photo: Morice Smithers/Labour Bulletin

Public sector strikes: an overview

COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND INFORMATION CENTRE (CRIC) looks at the public sector, and examines some of the reasons for the recent upsurge in strike activity.

For the last six months railway workers, health workers, teachers, policemen and prison warders have hit the headlines. The sector has experienced an upsurge in worker action unmatched in South African history. At the same time, it is the subject of considerable attention in COSATU.

This new confidence is a direct result of the changed political climate in the country. The negotiations process which de Klerk has committed himself to, has limited the government's ability to resort to repressive means to contain worker militancy. There is a degree of confusion in government structures, especially in the bantustans. Workers have therefore seized the initiative.

Public sector strikes have hit a wide range of bodies, but the issues underlying the strikes are often the same. Wages, union recognition, solidarity with dismissed or harassed workers, and racial discrimination, are the most frequent reasons for work stoppages.

Worker grievances

Wages

The Commission for Administration (COA) is responsible for setting wage rates for most workers employed in central and provincial government (and their wage rates are used as a guide by many other public bodies). It has a policy of setting wages on a 'moderately' competitive basis with the private sector. In reality, however, employees, especially low-paid workers, are paid well below the market rate.

According to the COA, 182 474 people in central government service were paid below R580 per month in September 1989, before the salary increases of this year. The average wage in this category was likely to be well below R580.

A further 149 219 people were paid between R580 and R990 per month. Again, most of these workers were paid below the top rate, and were

probably bunched in the bottom sector of the wage bracket. Together, these two groups make up 45% of central government employees, and are mostly African workers.

Wages in the municipal sector vary considerably. The large cities tend to pay more, but further from the urban centres wages are much lower. Cape Town has the highest minimum rate, R720 per month. On the other hand Mooi River pays a minimum of R270 per month. Workers do not receive much more than the minimum - in the case of Mooi River the average is around R300 per month.

Parastatal wages are slightly higher. SARHWU estimated during the recent rail strike that 90% of its members received R600 per month. Posts and Telecommunications general assistants, who are the bulk of POTWA's membership, receive a minimum of R522 per month.

Over the past few years the state has stressed that wages should rise below inflation. The state argues that salaries have not fallen that much,

Employment in the public sector

The public sector consists of many different institutions: central, provincial and local government bodies, the parastatals (ESKOM, Transnet, Postal and Telecommunications), autonomous bodies such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and National Parks Board, the structures of the bantustans, and the security apparatus of the state.

In 1989 at least 15,6% of the economically active population were working for these bodies, making the state by far the largest single employer in the country. There is however a very low level of progressive trade union organisation among public sector workers.

Work in the public sector is racially structured. Table II shows that Africans perform manual work, while more skilled work is performed by whites (see 'other' column). Africans who fall in the 'other' category are usually in less skilled occupations such as clerks.

Most of the security personnel in the public sector are white, and a high proportion of educators and nursing personnel are white.

A third of all working whites are in state employment, and the vast majority of these are Afrikaners - over half of all working Afrikaners are employed by the state. For other groups the figures are less - 18% of 'coloureds', 14% of Indians, and 13% of Africans are employed by the state.

State policy since 1987 has been to freeze jobs in the public sector - ie. not to replace people who retire or resign. Workers have experienced the freeze as an intensification of work, as fewer workers do the same jobs. Most job losses are in the parastatal enterprises, while central and provincial state employment has remained relatively constant.

However, social services such as education and health are desperately understaffed. ☆

since workers receive 'notch adjustments' (ie the wage goes up with experience) and merit increases (increases for individuals at the discretion of management). While these increases have helped to cope with the rising cost of living,

they have not fully compensated. At the same time, wages of the majority of black workers start from an extremely low base. Even if their wage increases kept up with inflation, they would be no closer to a reasonable wage.

Clearly, most wages were below the August 1989 Supplemented Living Level of R691. Given the extremely low level of wages, it is not surprising that they are a burning demand for striking workers.

Pressurised by the anger

TABLE I Public sector employment Sept 1989*

Department of General Affairs	337 550
(SADF, police and prisons)	127 000)
Own Affairs	185 349
Provincial Administrations	228 858
Self-governing territories	197 664
Universities & Technikons	51 850
Transnet	77 026
P&T	95 483
Other public corporations	133 807
Local Authorities	252 711
Agricultural Marketing Boards	3 066
Other	120 512
Total	1 683 876

* Excludes "independent" bantustans.

TABLE II Occupation according to population group', Sept 1989.*

	Labourers ¹	Educators	Nursing ²	Services ³	Other ⁴
White	1 632	81 920	25 883	84 533	111 081
Coloured	38 272	38 124	15 082	13 469	20 337
Indian	2 539	16 016	6 002	3 722	8 326
African	211 881	126 526	43 690	47 340	51 882
TOTAL	254 324	262 586	90 657	149 064	191 626

* Excludes "independent" bantustans, parastatals and local authorities.

¹ Or General Assistants. ² All nursing personnel.

³ Mostly security. ⁴ 520 Occupations, from clerks to professionals.

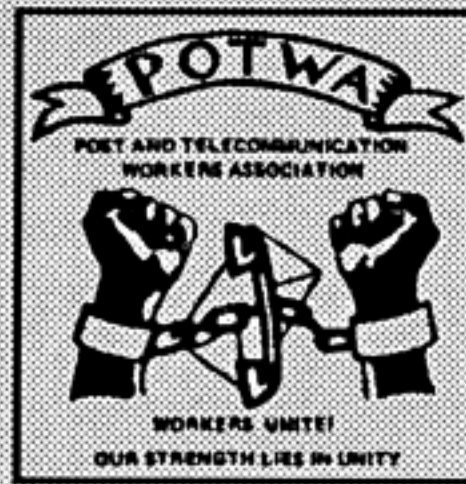
and action of workers, the government announced significant increases in April, over and above the 10% non-pensionable allowance given to public servants on April 1. Over 250 000 of the lowest paid workers (ie general assistants) are to receive increases ranging from 16% to 122%. It is likely that 122% adjustments will be reserved for those who earn R250. Nevertheless, the wage increases are a clear victory for public sector workers.

Racial discrimination

SARHWU, SAMWU, POTWA and NEHAWU all report racial abuse of individual workers, ranging from verbal insults to physical attacks. Racial abuse seems to have increased with the rising political tension in the country.

Discrimination in working conditions and facilities ranges from racially separate canteens, to being informed of rights in disciplinary hearings in an alien language.

Formally, there is no discrimination in conditions of employment in the public sector. The same wages are paid for the same work, for example. Yet in practice discrimination is rife, often in subtle form. Black workers believe that promotion and merit increases are defined on a racial basis. African workers are often employed as 'temporary' workers. In practice, this can remain 'temporary' for as much as 45 years. They do not enjoy security of employment, and their 'temporary' status either ex-



SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAY
AND
HARBOURS UNION



cludes them from benefits such as access to housing schemes or pension funds, or limits access to inferior schemes.

Privatisation

The economic and political crisis of the eighties has led the

state to attempt to implement Thatcherite measures to reduce the public sector. State strategy includes the 'commercialisation' of state enterprises, which means retrenchment, a freeze on new employment, and attempts to reduce real wages, as well as a drive to privatise as much of the public sector as possible (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 Nos 3 and 4).

Anti-privatisation protests this year have forced the state to retreat somewhat. It seems that many state enterprises, such as ESKOM, Posts and Telecommunications, and Transnet, may not be privatised for at least five years, if at all. However, the commercialisation of state enterprises will continue.

Union recognition

State policy regarding union recognition differs. Universities and some municipalities have, after protracted struggles, taken a more liberal stance than the central and provincial bodies. The SA Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) has formal recognition agreements with only two municipalities, but it negotiates with many more.

In other sectors, management has taken a much tougher line. Recognition has featured as a key demand for railway workers, police and prison workers and health workers. In general the state has been reluctant to recognise progressive unions, preferring to negotiate with tame staff associations which have an established membership.

Labour relations in the public sector

In 1988 the state initiated its first survey of labour relations in the public sector. A Directorate of Labour Relations was created in the COA to co-ordinate labour relations. This year the state will establish a Centralised Bargaining Forum as suggested by Wiehahn. The forum will consist of the COA as employer, and the recognised staff associations. It excludes any progressive union. Similar forums are presently being established in the parastatals (see Legal Notes, p 77).

State strategy of negotiating with tame staff associations and excluding militant democratic unions has not been successful. Work stoppages are often long, bitter and violent because strikers do not have access to bargaining forums, their unions are not recognised, and management resists negotiating. In most cases the state has been forced to develop relations with unrecognised unions in order to resolve strikes.

The bureaucratic nature of public sector decision-making has also hindered resolution of strikes. Decisions have to be taken at a level far removed from the actual work stoppage. In the case of Transvaal hospi-

tal strikes the intervention of the provincial Member of Executive Committee in charge of hospital services was necessary before decisions could be made. In the case of the teachers' strike the intervention of Minister Stoffel van der Merwe was necessary.

Management often moves quickly to dismiss striking workers, especially in smaller bodies such as municipalities.

In the case of the railway workers, however, management attempted to dismiss over 20 000 workers! This too does not help resolve the strike, and management has often been forced to live with considerable disruption, or re-hire the workers.

Public sector strikes are often marred by violence, not least because management is quick to call in the police.

In general the state has often been caught on the wrong foot by worker action. It does not have the policies, procedures or structures to adequately deal with workers' grievances.

Union organisation

White workers.

White workers have responded in various ways to the state's efforts to reduce the size of the public sector, and to the militant struggles of black workers.

Racial tension has intensified, with frequent attacks on

black workers. White workers have alleged that whites are being 'intimidated' by black workers, and that white jobs are in danger from blacks.

Their activities and statements are hard to separate from the ultra right-wing political groupings. However, the impact of the right-wing organisations on white workers has yet to be fully tested. Stayaway threats after Mandela's release were quickly withdrawn, after it became clear that white workers were unlikely to respond in significant numbers.

White worker militancy does not only take on a racial form. It is also economic. The recent strike by artisans at Transnet was primarily a form of militant craft unionism, as a defence against the effects of privatisation. (see p 14)

There seems to be some limited scope for the recruitment of white workers by non-racial unions. SARHWU, POTWA and SAMWU all report large numbers of white workers wanting to join them, as the unions are seen to be fighting for the rights of workers. POPCRU also reports white policemen and prison warders wanting to join.

Staff Associations.

Staff associations have clearly been caught unawares by the militancy of public sector workers. They have attempted to compensate with new 'militancy' in their concern for wages and working conditions.

For example, the South African Nurses Association



Recently released ANC leader, Wilton Mkwayi, joins the public sector march in Johannesburg to the Stock Exchange

Photo: Morice Smithers/Labour Bulletin

marched on parliament to demand wage increases in an attempt to recover ground lost to progressive unions. The Public Servants League threatened strike action over salaries. Many of their members in the Western Cape recently participated in the HWU strike (see p 18). And recently the Black Trade Union, opposed to SARHWU, declared its first ever dispute with Transnet over wages.

The Public Servants Association has become considerably more vocal in its demands for salary increases. They have held mass meetings throughout the country. They have also discovered a new concern for lower paid workers.

Deteriorating conditions in

the public sector have contributed to the militancy of black workers in the democratic unions. Clearly the members - both black and white - of the staff associations are facing the same problems. Thus the staff associations are responding to the dissatisfaction of their own members, as well as to the challenge of the militant unions.

In their attempt to prevent a drift of their members to the democratic unions they are burdened by a lack of credibility because of their past inactivity. But they have the advantage of well-developed structures and ready access to and support from the state and its structures.

Progressive union organisation

At the last COSATU congress (1989) the public sector unions only had 71 000 paid-up members. While other unions have members in the public sector, clearly most of the sector is unorganised. The recent worker action poses considerable challenges for COSATU. Striking workers are often not members, and only join the unions after downing tools.

Conflict has emerged between progressive unions competing to organise the striking workers. For example, NEHAWU has to contend with the unaffiliated HWU in Cape Town (see p 22) and in Pretoria recently, NACTU's NUPSW has clashed with SAMWU over the allegiance

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of municipal workers on strike there. Worker militancy is high, and wildcat strikes have forced unions into actions for which they are not prepared.

Conclusion

The current dynamism of the public sector comes at a time of considerable change and uncertainty in the South Africa. Workers have responded energy and militancy. Public sector workers have made considerable gains in the recent period. The state has been forced to concede on wages, de facto recognition of unions and the right to strike. It also shows signs of weakness in its commitment to privatisation.

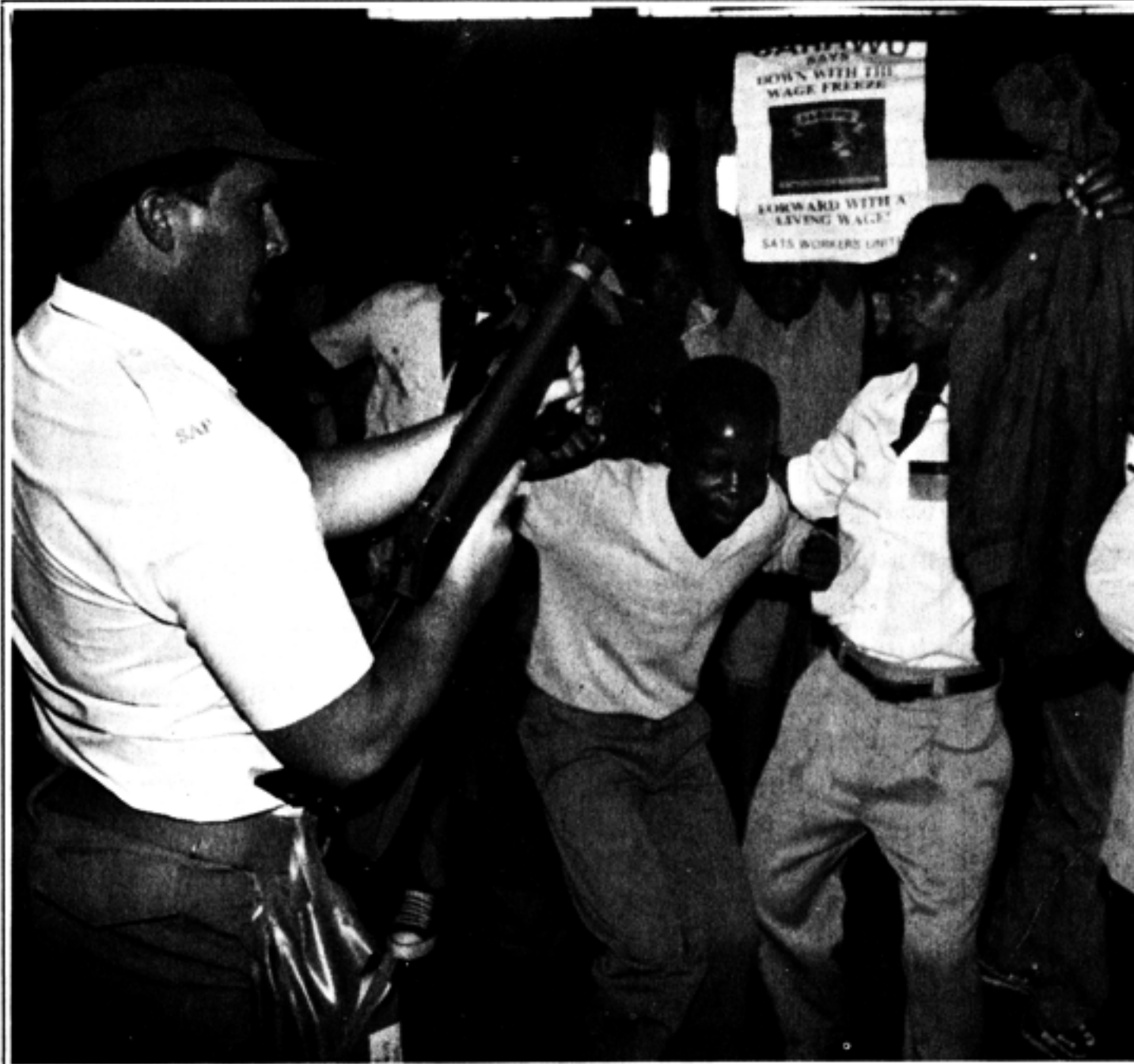
The public sector has great strategic importance. Strikes by railway, postal or electricity

workers disrupt the economy. Strikes in the police, prisons, courts and state departments have the potential to paralyse government. Public sector strikes and stayaways have contributed to the crisis of the bantustan regimes. Labour action in some spheres also poses a direct challenge to state policy - this is clearest in the teachers' strikes, where the teachers are now instituting some form of 'peoples' education'.

At the same time union organisation is still very weak, and in some cases, officials and workers lack experience. COSATU will have to put more resources into these affiliates if the current gains are to be consolidated.

One particularly serious

weakness is that militant democratic unions have barely begun to organise more skilled workers in the public sector - teachers, nurses and especially white-collar workers. Until clerical and administrative workers are organised in this sector, unions will lack the muscle to mount a serious challenge to state policy towards its employees ☆



SARHWU workers confront police during the November strike

Photo: Adil Bradlow /Atrapix

Labour action in the public sector

Transnet (SATS)

Some 30 - 40 000 black rail workers struck under the banner of SARHWU in early November.

Worker demands included:

- ★ A living wage of R1 500
- ★ No privatisation
- ★ An end to Sats' harsh new Disciplinary Code
- ★ Recognition of the union.

The strike was settled in late January 1990. Management agreed to recognise SARHWU in areas where it is registered. They agreed to negotiate wages in talks starting in early April. They also re-employed the 20 000 workers who were dismissed.

More recently, 2 000 workers in the Northern Transvaal went on strike after 31 workers were dismissed. Workers returned to work after two weeks when management agreed to arbitration.

White artisans have also become more militant. The all-white Artisan's Staff Association has led a series of work stoppages, starting in late March. The stoppages started spontaneously in various parts of the country, with the Western Cape and Eastern Transvaal taking the lead. The artisan's are from the mechanical, electrical, and maintenance workshops. Ten thousand of the total of 17 000 artisans have participated in stoppages. Grievances are:

- ★ The absence of market related salaries

★ Bonuses given only to certain grades of artisans pending a review of market related salaries

★ Long hours of overtime.

Their dissatisfaction is linked to job freezes, retrenchments, falling real wages and commercialisation of workshops.

The Association attempted to negotiate with Transnet in the Labour Council in early April. However, they broke off negotiations after finding that the Transnet representatives had no mandate to negotiate meaningfully. In the period since then sporadic work stoppages have continued. Negotiations with Transnet have been resumed.

Posts and Telecommunications

POTWA is presently still in negotiations with Post Office management. Amongst the demands are a living wage of R1 100, an end to privatisation, and an end to discriminatory practices, including classifying black workers as temporary.

However, there have been several strikes this year, notably in Durban, Rustenburg, Nelspruit, Pretoria and Verwoerdburg. Several thousand workers have been involved in total. The strikes have lasted for two or three days, though in the case of Verwoerdburg it lasted for a week.

The central issue in the strikes has been management's attempts to disrupt the union. Management has attempted to transfer Potwa shop-stewards to other sites of work, and workers have stepped in to defend the shop-stewards. All the strikes have been successfully resolved.

Municipalities

Strikes have occurred at the Port

Elizabeth, Kroonstad, Rini, Butterworth, Cape Town, Umtata, Pretoria and Ibhayi Councils. Issues include wages, recognition and solidarity with dismissed workers.

Water

Workers at the Rand Water Board, represented by the independent Municipal, State, Farm and Allied Workers Union (MSFAWU), have demonstrated against the Board during March and April over the dismissal of 270 workers last year.

The RWB supplies water for South Africa's industrial heartland, the PWV. A court case is pending. The union is also organising the Umgeni Water Board, which supplies Durban with water.

On 23 April, 500 workers at the RWB Zwartkopjes pumping station and depot near Alberton, went on strike over disciplinary moves against a shop steward.

Parks and Recreation

Workers at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park went on strike over wages. Increases were granted. Workers at Overvaal Resorts, organised by SACCAWU, went on strike over the dismissal of a fellow worker. The matter is still to be settled. White workers under the National Parks Board Staff Association have also been agitating for higher salaries.

The bantustans

Bophuthatswana: Clerks, magistrates, cleaners and prosecutors in the Bophuthatswana Justice Dept at Garankuwa went on strike over pay in mid-March. They were dismissed. Large numbers of public sector workers have participated

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in marches in Garankuwa, bringing the public sector to a standstill at points.

Venda: Much of the public service, including elements of the armed forces, was on strike in the period leading up to the coup (activists tell of Venda police assisting them to avoid detention in the recent wave of detentions in the Northern Transvaal). Amongst those on strike were the magistrates. In some instances they returned to work as people were detained or arrested, dismissed the cases against the accused, and went back on strike. Workers have been involved as members of the community opposed to the government. There was an almost 100% stayaway. The situation since the coup is not clear.

Gazankulu: Much of the public service was on strike for eight weeks in opposition to the Ntsanwisi regime. At points the strike was 100%. Ntsanwisi used the public sector strike as a reason to resist the demand of Gazankulu MPs for an immediate Legislative Assembly session - he claimed there was no staff to run the assembly. Workers returned to work last week.

Lebowa: Much of the public sector went on strike at the end of March, but returned to work shortly thereafter.

NOTRAPSU: Public sector workers and activists in the Northern Transvaal have formed NOTRAPSU, the Northern Transvaal Public Sector Union. The union is demanding pay on the same scales as in the 'South African' public sector, and recognition.

Education

The Transvaal teachers strike, and labour action at Unibo, Fort Hare and Durban universities are covered on pp 27 - 34.

In two separate strikes 187 workers at Port Elizabeth Technikon, and 300 workers at the University of PE, went on strike over the dismissal of fellow-workers.

Workers at the Ciskei Dept of Education, Bisho went on strike over wages and working conditions. The strike was spontaneous but most workers have since joined NEHAWU. The Military Council is investigating grievances.

Eastern Cape: 1 000 teachers went on strike at the beginning of April because of victimisation, overcrowding and inferior facilities. Teachers are back at work.

Anti-privatisation action

Public sector unions are strongly opposed to privatisation. An end to privatisation has been a demand in most public sector wage negotiations, and was a demand in the SARHWU strike. Workers engaged on a series of anti-privatisation marches in November last year. Since then there has been a further 11 marches in Durban, Bloemfontein, PE, Kimberley, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. During the marches memoranda outlining worker opposition to privatisation have been presented to government officials and to the President of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

Workers in Southern Natal have also engaged on a two day strike, and there have been numerous work stoppages throughout the country. A one day consumer boycott was called in Bloemfontein after permission for a Saturday morning march was refused.

Anti-privatisation action continues, and COSATU has planned a workshop for mid-May to define its strategy further. In the meantime, the public sector unions are to meet

with the Minister responsible for privatisation, Dawie de Villiers. ☆

Police and prisons

Labour action within the police and prisons service is led by the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU). Strikes and work stoppages have taken place around the country, notably at:

Stutterheim Prison: The prison was closed after all 131 black warders went on strike. The prisoners were transferred to Fort Glamorgan, and the warders were suspended without pay.

Cape: Police and warders at East London, Fort Beaufort, Grahamstown, Queenstown, King Williams Town, Kirkwood, Oudshoorn, George, Mossel Bay, Brandvlei, Worcester and Paarl have all participated in work stoppages.

Pollsmoor Prison: Warders went on strike and 87 were suspended without pay. The Prisons Service is attempting to evict 31 warders from their houses on prison property. The union is taking legal action.

Diepkloof Prison: At Diepkloof Prison 400 warders staged a sit-in over working conditions.

POPCRU has also participated in marches against privatisation and police brutality.

The demands of POPCRU are based on the grievances of warders and policemen concerning wages, discrimination and lack of representation. In outline they are:

- ★ A Living Wage, with an increase of R850 per month across the board
- ★ Recognition for POPCRU

★ An end to discrimination in the prisons service.

The response of the authorities to labour action has been harsh. Those participating have been suspended without pay or fired. In total, by the end of March, 707 warders had been suspended and 39 policemen had been fired. Despite this, POPCRU claimed 5 000 members at the end of March.

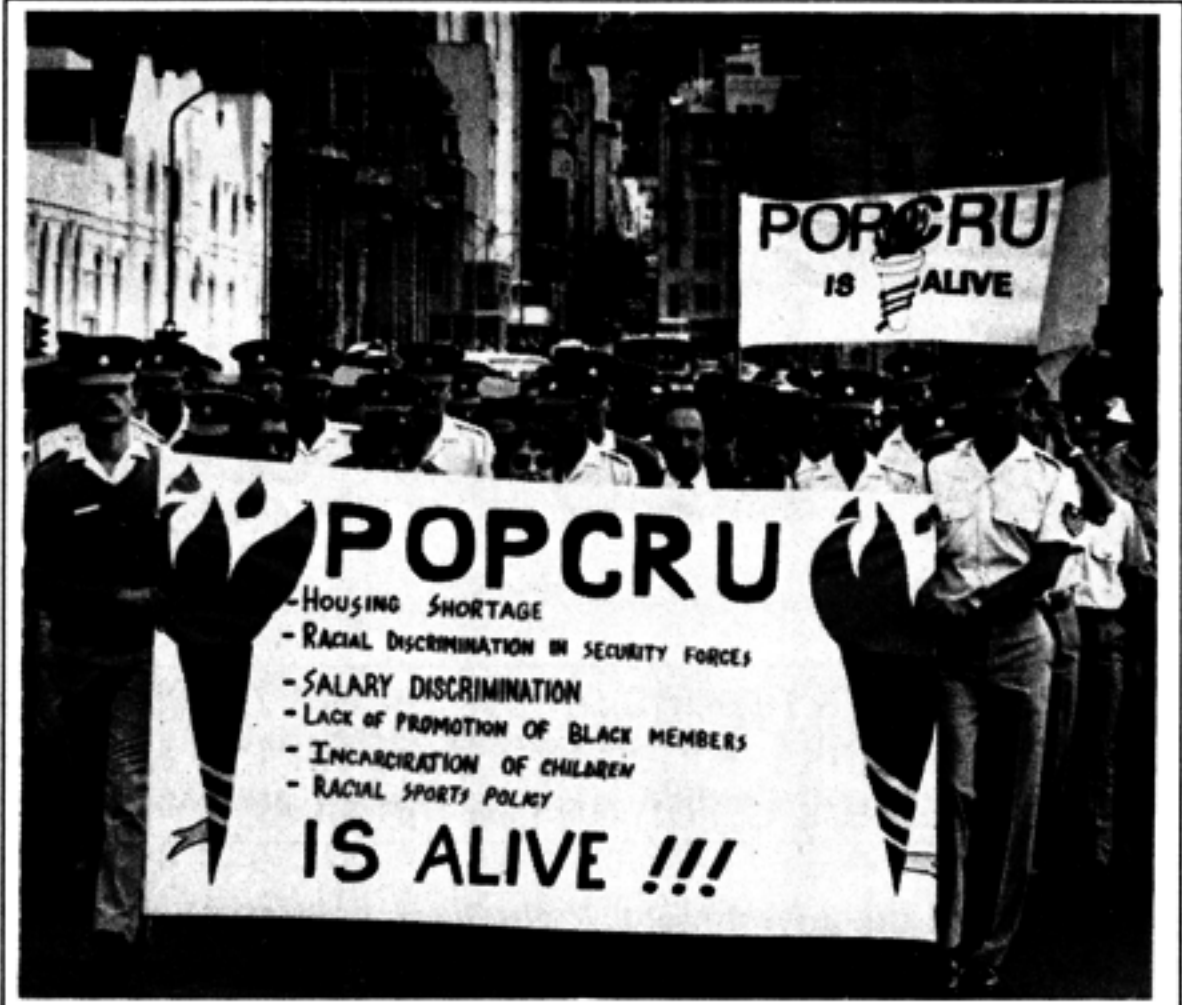
While the Commission for Administration has refused to release the salaries of policemen and prison warders, it was said in parliament that constables in the police force earn between R483 and R1 330 per month. POPCRU asserts that access to promotion and merit increases in salary are racially defined.

The Minister of Law and Order has recently responded to dissatisfaction in the ranks of police by increasing wages. Constables will receive an extra R160 per month, and other ranks less. A new procedure to determine promotions will be introduced in September.

Clearly there is an attempt to staunch the flow of police to the private sector. Early this year police were resigning at the rate of 22 per day, while the Witwatersrand police has lost over 10% of its personnel in the last 12 months. But the salary increases do not seem to have worked - forty-eight policemen resigned in the PWV area in the week after the increases were announced, almost all of them non-commissioned officers (constables, sergeants and warrant officers) who quoted dissatisfaction with pay as their reason for leaving.

POPCRU has not limited its criticism of the prisons and police to its members' own economic interests. It also objects to:

★ prisoners being segregated on racial lines;



Dissent from within - POPCRU members march their demands through Cape Town streets to parliament

Photo: Eric Miller/Afrapix

★ black warders not being allowed to work with white prisoners, black prisoners being fed inferior food;

★ more black prisoners per cell than white;

★ black prisoners sleeping on the floor while whites have beds;

★ black juveniles being locked up with prisoners while whites are sent to special institutions

POPCRU has brought to light grievances in the prisons and police which are the same as those of workers in companies throughout the country. It has also shown that the political support of the police and prisons service cannot be taken for granted - it is a subject for political organisation. Indeed, POPCRU has adopted the Freedom Charter, and wants to affiliate to COSATU. For the first time (other than in isolated instances of municipal police striking) the unity of the police and prisons service is under question.

This is especially true given the

uncertain role of the military in the bantustans. The attempted Bophuthatswana coup in 1988, various attempted coups in the Ciskei, the successful Transkei and Ciskei coups, the reluctance of some Bophuthatswana police to take action against protesters, and the recent Venda coup all testify to the instability in armed forces in SA.

It is a reminder that black policemen, soldiers, and prison warders share interests with the mass of South Africans - they too are oppressed and exploited. ☆



Cape health workers win major demands

RENÉE ROUX reports on the recent health workers strike in Cape Town. The strike ended in victory for the workers, and put the unaffiliated Health Workers Union on the map.

On 14 April the government announced that all hospital general assistants will receive an increase in their basic wages over and above the 10% increase granted to civil servants. The lowest paid workers' basic pay will increase from R260 to R515 per month, while those on the highest notch of general assistants will move from R584 to R784 per month. They will also receive night-shift and long-service allowances for the first time.

The wage increase was the result of sustained pressure by hospital workers throughout the country. However, workers are not satisfied and at a number of hospitals organised by COSATU's National Education and Health Workers Union (NEHAWU), workers continued working half-day for most of April. (See this edition, page 22)

Nevertheless, an important breakthrough was made by about 7 000 Cape Town workers and their Health Workers Union (HWU), who sustained a 16-day strike during March (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14

No 7 for an earlier account of the strike). The union had made it clear, on returning to work, that workers were suspending their strike pending an answer to their demand for a minimum wage of R1 141. The 14 April increases were announced two days before the deadline given by union.

Build-up to the strike

Since the HWU was formed in 1985, the Cape Provincial Administration (CPA) has refused union recognition and access for officials. This has made it difficult to build structures. In a few hospitals workers' committees that negotiate on local issues managed to get recognition.

Frustrations led to a one-day strike in December 1988 in three hospitals. Workers demanded a minimum of R800, union recognition, permanent status, three months maternity leave and a 40-hour week. Groote Schuur workers met the Director of Hospital Services of the CPA, who promised he would attend to their demands. They received

a small increase - in the region of 7% - but made no progress with recognition.

During 1989 the union continued to organise and increased its membership to 4 000, still only in the Western Cape. A number of strategies, including the formation of the Public Sector Alliance Committee together with NACTU's National Union of Public Service Workers (NUPSW) and the SA Black Municipal and Allied Workers Union (SABMAWU) and two unaffiliated unions, failed. COSATU affiliates were not part of this alliance.

Towards the end of 1989 HWU members were becoming increasingly militant, but agreed to wait for joint action with other unions in the Alliance. HWU tried to initiate a joint national programme of action with the other unions, but this did not materialise.

The strike starts in seven hospitals

Eventually pressure from the membership, and another failed attempt to meet hospital

authorities, spurred workers on to action. At a mass meeting of workers from seven hospitals, it was decided to down tools on Monday 5 March. Those present drew up a list of demands to submit to the local authorities at the start of the strike. The demands were:

- An increase in the minimum wage from R260 to R1500 per month. The union later revised this figure to R1 140.
- Permanent status for all workers
- Six months paid maternity leave
- Recognition of HWU
- A 40-hour week
- An end to privatisation.

The same procedure was followed in all the hospitals at the start of the strike: committees submitted the demands but refused to negotiate with local management. They also demanded a meeting with people who could make decisions, and not their messengers. HWU submitted the demands and a request to meet the Ministers of Health and Public Administration and the Commission of Administration (COA).

Fifteen hundred workers joined the strike in the first week. Their demands grabbed the attention of workers throughout the region, and by 14 March 7 000 workers in seventeen state hospitals and day-clinics were on strike. These included NEHAWU members at the Red Cross Children's Hospital. While the vast majority were general assistants (cleaners, tea-makers, laundry workers, gardeners, etc.) other workers also joined. In a number of hospitals these

included porters, pharmacy assistants and clerical staff.

Massive support for hospital workers

For the duration of the strike shopstewards from different hospitals met in the evenings to strategise and build support for the strike with other organisations. A strike support committee was formed to popularise the workers demands and organise relief. Public support was mobilised throughout the Western Cape. Other hospital staff also showed support for the strike, including doctors, nurses and even the superintendent of Groote Schuur hospital. Nurses refused to scab on the striking workers' jobs, but were prevented from joining the strike: their lives are governed by extreme hierarchy, strict conditions of service and fear.

Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) members at two workplaces supported the strike. Members at the University of Cape Town staged stoppages and demonstrations. TGWU members at a private laundry were approached by their management to work overtime in order to do hospital laundry. They refused.

There were no dismissals or even threats. There was also minimal police interference. This meant that the strike was relatively calm and disciplined.

There was one incident at Groote Schuur when a picket turned into a scuffle between strikers and scabs. A few people were hurt, but the workers committee managed to calm things down.

The state agrees to negotiate

That same day the union was approached by the Administrator of the Cape to meet with senior administration officials. While these were not the ministers requested by HWU, they did have some decision-making powers. The union decided to begin the process of negotiation.

On 14 March the union had its first meeting with a delegation which included the director-general of the COA, the director-general of the CPA, the director-general of Hospital Services, and their legal advisors. The union delegation was composed of one worker per hospital and officials from HWU and NEHAWU.

Wages remained the major stumbling block to a settlement, as the state representatives insisted that they had no mandate to decide on wages. They promised that there would be something over and above the 10% already announced for all public servants, but would not commit themselves beyond saying that the figures would be announced after a month.

After a series of meetings and report-backs, agreement was reached on a range of issues:

- the working week would be reduced from 44 to 40 hours
- the principle of maternity leave was accepted
- general assistants would all get permanent status
- the provincial administration would meet HWU on a regular basis,
- stop-order facilities would be granted where the union proves its representivity
- shopsteward committees



Health Workers' Union members out on strike

Photo: HWU

would be recognised and workers could choose their representatives in disciplinary hearings

- union officials would be granted access to hospitals for meetings
- administration committed itself to fair labour practices and no victimisation of workers
- workers would take the lost time off their leave and receive pay for the duration of the strike.
- the CPA would consult with HWU about privatisation.

The union wanted a concrete wage offer, but realised that it would have to wait. On the basis of the other victories, workers decided to suspend the strike on 22 March pending the response. They gave management a strict deadline: they would resume their action if nothing concrete was offered by 16 April. While

the leadership realised the difficulty of re-starting the strike, they were quite confident that they could succeed if necessary.

Significance of the victories

The wages aside, HWU members achieved significant victories, particularly the right to organise, to be represented and to negotiate. Effectively they also won some acknowledgement of the right to strike because there were no dismissal threats.

Most of the workers were members of the Public Servants League (PSL) at the time of joining the strike. PSL is the staff association for coloured workers. HWU claims the PSL has never represented workers' interests even though it has been making radical sounds of late. Now that the HWU has some

form of recognition, workers feel safe to resign from the PSL. HWU gained approximately 3 000 new members during the strike. The union has also won the legitimacy it needed to make a breakthrough in other sectors, particularly nursing staff, who are showing strong interest in joining the union.

At present the union is consolidating its structures in the hospitals and building on the gains made during the strike. According to the acting general-secretary, Hassen Mohammed, the union is aware that the support for the strike was largely spontaneous, and the majority of the workers scarcely know about trade unionism.

HWU members are by no means satisfied with the wage increase or the shift and long-service allowances announced on 14 April. A number of ca-

tegories of workers who joined the strike have also been excluded from the new conditions. But the union has decided not to rush into another strike, but rather to consolidate its gains and formalise its relationship with the administration. The CPA seems set to make this a drawn-out process, which can absorb all the union's resources. At present they are preparing to submit stop-order forms as proof of membership.

On the ground workers are making sure that the strike agreement sticks. At Groote Schuur shopstewards have been granted an office and telephone. At five day-hospitals workers went on strike on 24 April because a manager had been victimising workers since the March strike. She has been transferred to a department where she will have no contact with workers.

Weaknesses of the strike and future challenges

The strike had two important weaknesses. While very well-supported amongst general assistants, the dispute did not draw in nursing staff. This is why the hospitals were able to continue functioning and why the strike carried on as long as it did.

The strike raises the thorny question of organising nurses. They form the back-bone of the health system. Until they are organised health sector unions will remain weak.

Secondly, the strike was limited to one region. Apart from the wage increases, none of the new conditions have been extended to workers under other

provincial administrations. One reason for this is the disunity of workers organised in different unions.

Some observers have suggested that HWU was voluntaristic; having no strategy, but rather riding the strike on the grievances of the most exploited workers. However, this has been a feature of most public sector strikes. The union makes slow headway under repressive conditions; tension mounts; then something triggers a strike which rapidly develops into a mass action of militant, frustrated workers, many of whom only join the union after downing tools.

Unity in the health sector

A merger between the HWU, which is strong in the Cape, and NEHAWU, which strong in other regions and the largest union in the health sector, would seem an obvious route towards creating one national union. During the strike the HWU got support from COSATU regional structures, and NEHAWU was an active partner in the strike. But this unity in action has not provided enough incentive to merge with NEHAWU. There are complex historical reasons for this.

HWU was part of the 1987 talks which gave birth to NEHAWU, and it attended the launching congress. According to Mohammed "the union committed itself to joining in six months time, once we had consolidated our structures". This was treated with suspicion by NEHAWU, and it proceeded to open an office in Cape Town and organise against HWU.

Mohammed claims: "NEHAWU smeared us and took away two hospitals." The union suspended its contact with NEHAWU after attempts to get their co-operation failed.

The decision of HWU to stay out of COSATU also has political undertones. HWU was started primarily by activists in the Health Worker Society, which was allied to the Cape Action League, which is now part of the new Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA). This political trend is highly critical of the UDF-COSATU-ANC-SACP grouping. These political differences may well influence the decision of the HWU leadership to remain 'non-aligned'.

Both Mohammed and Ronald Mbanana, an HWU member at Groote Schuur Hospital, stressed their commitment to 'non-sectarianism'. According to Mbanana: "We have amongst our members active ANC and PAC supporters. We have worked well together and will not allow political affiliation or ideological differences to divide workers. If we affiliate to either of the federations we will divide workers."

At present HWU is confident of its ability to stand outside the federations and build alliances with other public sector unions through campaigns. Mbanana says: "We are strong enough to stand alone. We will work with both federations. We will join in campaigns which are COSATU-led, eg the anti-LRA campaign or the anti-privatisation campaign, but we won't affiliate until COSATU and NACTU merge. Even if this

takes twenty years.”

Mohammed admits that this might not be adequate if the state starts implementing its privatisation programme in the health sector, and says that the question of affiliation will al-

ways be on the agenda.

Mohammed also recognises that COSATU is responsible for most of the joint campaigns that unaffiliated unions can slot into. The union has also agreed in prin-

ciple to meet with NEHAWU to sort out their differences in the interest of worker unity. The union will go into such a meeting with a much stronger bargaining hand than in 1987. ☆

Health worker action nationally

The health sector has seen much action this year. Apart from the Western Cape strike:

HF Verwoerd Hospital: In February 700 administration, cleaning and kitchen staff went on strike for two days. Issues were dissatisfaction with the government's 10% wage increase, and a dispute over annual bonuses. The hospital administration undertook to investigate grievances.

Frere Hospital: Eight hundred workers at Frere Hospital in East London went on strike for two days. Workers won the right to have a workers committee negotiate with the hospital over wages, working conditions etc.

Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, Mdantsane: Six hundred administration and cleaning workers struck for nine days in February, demanding a living wage, recognition for NEHAWU, parity with SA workers performing the same job, and an end to arbitrary transfers. The new Ciskei Military Council has undertaken to investigate their demands.

Garankuwa: Workers at the Garankuwa hospital went on strike demanding a living wage of R1 100, with a R400 across the board increase; the removal of two racist officials from the hospital; and recognition of NEHAWU.

A later demand was that a commission of enquiry be appointed to investigate police action in the strike. Police attacked and tear-gassed workers both in and outside the hospital, and arrested workers and even some patients in the wards.

The officials were removed from the hospital, and workers won a workers committee, which will include union officials. The police action is being investigated.

Ngwelezane Hospital, Empangeni: Workers stopped work after discovering that they have been underpaid since 1988. The Kwazulu Department of Health is investigating.

Witwatersrand: Workers marched from Coronation Hospital to the JG Strydom Hospital to demand:

- A Living Wage of R1 100
- Desegregation of health services
- Parity in wages between white and black
- An end to privatisation.

Workers at 12 Reef hospitals organised by NEHAWU presented memorandums outlining the same demands to their superintendents. When the hospital authorities did not respond, workers at Baragwanath, Hillbrow, Johannesburg and Natal-spruit Hospitals decided to stage lunch-time work stoppages, which have since been intensified to afternoon stoppages. Other hospitals wish to join the stoppages, but the union is attempting to restrain them. More hospitals will join the action if it is clear that the authorities will not respond to worker demands.

Stop Press 1 500 general assistants, including porters, drivers, medication packers, kitchen and laundry workers, went on strike on Monday 30 April at Baragwanath Hospital. The workers demanded, in addition to the above, a R400 across-the-board increment; abolition of temporary status for long time workers; the inclusion of health workers in the LRA and an end to racist employment practise. At the time of going to press, the srike threatened to spread to nurses at the Hospital, and to other hospitals in the Transvaal.

Chalks down!

Teachers strike in the Transvaal

MANDLA NKOMFE and IAN MOLL report on the recent teachers' strike in the Transvaal, during which thousands of black teachers, including school principals, shook off their 'conservative' image and aligned themselves with the mass democratic movement.

The current mood of defiance in South Africa has galvanised many sectors of society. The teaching corps is the latest to be affected by this mood. Following the February 2 announcements by state president FW de Klerk, teachers protested against their worsening conditions of work.

On 14 February thousands of teachers from Soweto and Alexandra marched to the Braamfontein offices of the Regional Director of the Department of Education and Training, Mr Struwig, and presented a memorandum containing their demands. While the action involved teachers from all teacher organisations, the National Education Union of S A (NEUSA) was prominent in organising the march.

On 1 March teachers at a mass meeting held at Funda Centre, Soweto, resolved to go on strike. This decision reflected the militant and fight-

ing mood of the teachers on the ground. Teacher organisations were not adequately prepared for this situation. NEUSA in particular found that the mobilisation of teachers on the ground was far more rapid and extensive than the scope of their existing organisational structures. They have been forced to adjust these structures rapidly to accommodate to the changed conditions.

On 4 March, NEUSA held a consultation meeting with community organisations in which this situation was discussed. It became clear that there was a lack of prior preparation for the strike, in terms of involving parents and students in the community. However, the community organisations took the view that teachers, like any group of employees, had a right to withdraw their labour because of bad working conditions. Community organisations resolved to support the

strike, and do all that was possible to make it a success.

The strike starts

The strike started on 5 March. More than 6 000 teachers came out on strike to demand, amongst other things:

- ☞ The reinstatement of teachers who had previously been dismissed
- ☞ The employment of more teachers
- ☞ A reduction of the amount of teaching periods
- ☞ A living wage - R500 increase across the board and after deductions
- ☞ Recognition of the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA)
- ☞ The repairing of schools
- ☞ The building of more schools.

This was by far the most important strike action undertaken by teachers who traditionally have a conservative reputation. The only other

significant action of this kind took place early in 1989 by in Natal among teachers, who were organised under the banner of NEHAWU.

The strike involved all teachers from approximately 350 primary and senior (lower and higher) schools in Soweto, Alexandra and Tembisa. The action spread well beyond the DET schools, and included some private schools, for example the Catholic schools Immaculata and St Matthews. Teachers from schools for disabled children were exempted from joining the strike.

The process of consultation

The strike was co-ordinated through the structures of NEUSA (Soweto branch, and later the Transvaal regional council). Through the nine sub-branches in Soweto and the other branch committees teachers were able to discuss and arrive at decisions on the course of action. The Soweto teachers elected delegates to a general meeting, where all the sub-branches were represented. The sub-branches were:

- ☞ Zojazem (Zola, Jabulane, Zondi and Emdeni)
- ☞ Motlana (Moletsane, Tladi, Naledi)
- ☞ Sephima-DC (Senaoane, Phiri, Mapetla, Dlamini, and Chiawelo)
- ☞ Diepkloof
- ☞ Dobsonville
- ☞ Meadowlands
- ☞ Orlando West, Mzimhlophe/Dube
- ☞ Orlando East, Klipspruit, Pimville
- ☞ Momomoja (Mofolo, Moroka, Molapo, Jabavu)

While most teachers were on



Recognition of NEUSA is a key demand

strike, the students were not part of the action in a conscious way. The Soweto Students Congress (SOSCO) called on students to report for school so as to work out ways of developing alternative forms of education. Unfortunately, the call was not heeded, precisely because there was a lack of preparation by both the community and the students. Only in very few schools was the action explained at general parents' meetings. The absence of joint parent, teacher and student associations aggravated the problems. Most students simply did not report for school, while some came only for a few hours.

The special nature of a teachers strike, where those who most immediately suffer are the students, and not the employers, makes consultation with the broader community, especially the parents, all the more important. If this is not properly done strike action could generate conflict between the community, students and teachers.

Call to return to school

Nelson Mandela, during his welcome rally on 13 February at

the FNB stadium in Soweto, urged students who had been on boycott at the time, to return to school. At the same rally, a march by teachers to protest against their working conditions was announced for the following day. This march, and the strike which followed, seemed to contradict Mandela's call, but this was not the case.

The teachers made it clear that the call for students to return to school did not mean an end to struggle against the appalling working conditions of teachers. Teachers have a right to strike for a living wage and decent conditions of work, it was argued, and therefore their strike should be supported by the wider community.

Community organisations supported the view that teachers should consider going back to school, while not wishing to undermine their right to strike. Teachers, however, felt strongly about not going back to school until their demands were met.

Meeting with the minister

The strikes soon spread to other parts of the Transvaal. In Katlehong, teachers came out on strike immediately after the taxi feud that erupted there. Their demands included both teacher grievances and opposition to the violence in the township. In the Vaal region, teachers came out on strike in the wake of the Sebokeng massacre on 26 March, and linked up their demands with teachers on strike in other areas. The West Rand NEUSA branch (including Kagiso and Randfontein) staged a solidarity



Teachers meet in Johannesburg just before their march to DET

Photo: /Afrapix

strike with their comrades in other branches on 9 and 12 March. In Pretoria, teachers in Atteridgeville, Soshanguve and Mamelodi have all engaged in solidarity actions with the striking teachers.

A national delegation of teachers met the Minister of Education and Training, Dr Stoffel van der Merwe. He said that some of the demands were political and had to be referred to the political structures of the state. This meant that some demands would be raised by political parties at the negotiation table. Nevertheless, there were gains that were made:

- ☞ The minister accepted the grievances as legitimate.
- ☞ He was forced to talk to NEUSA and thus recognised it as a force in the teaching fraternity
- ☞ The strike involved the majority of the teachers on the ground, thus enhancing the prospects of unity. Teachers who were part of the

more conservative Transvaal United African Teachers Association (TUATA) also joined the strike.

- ☞ About half of all principals joined the action.
- ☞ The strike increased the political consciousness of the teachers.

Within NEUSA, there was one very significant outcome of the meeting with Stoffel van der Merwe. The minister challenged the organisation to provide evidence that it represented large numbers of teachers. Since the state of emergency in 1985, NEUSA had not given much attention to paid-up membership. NEUSA activists often dismissed criticisms about this weakness by calling it the "numbers game". The strike, however, forced NEUSA to take this question seriously. Transvaal regional organisers of NEUSA have now been addressing branches to

emphasise the need to build a solid, mass membership on paper. As one NEUSA member put it at a meeting on 28 April, "Stoffel has thrown down the gauntlet to us, and we need to meet the challenge."

The strike is suspended

As the strike was entering its fifth week, community organisations, including the UDF, and Mandela advised that teachers should think of going back to school. The teachers themselves realised that a prolonged strike might cause disunity within their ranks. They felt that a time period was necessary within which the gains they had made could be consolidated, and strong communication and consultative structures established. There was also a need for greater education amongst teachers about the strengths and limitations of the strike tactic. The teachers therefore decided

to suspend the strike, and to report to school on 18 April, when the new term began.

The teachers gave the Minister of Education and Training three months within which to respond to their grievances. They expect him to at least meet their short-term demands.

In the meantime, teachers agreed that:

- ⇒ they would not agree to any form of inspection as part of the defiance campaign.
- ⇒ principals and heads of department should teach to alleviate the shortage of teachers.
- ⇒ they also demanded the immediate resignation of the regional director, Mr Struwig.

Prospects for peoples education

Teachers have made some head-way in moving towards democratic control of the school. The extremely commandist structure of the Department of Education and Training (DET) did not allow teachers a say in the running of the schools. Students have always been at the fore-front of struggle against the undemocratic atmosphere at schools.

The teachers have also agreed not to be party to the cultural activities organised by the DET. Teachers and students will instead arrange alternative cultural and sporting activities. The National Sports Congress (NSC) has agreed to promote sport at primary and secondary schools. An interim committee to organise sport, musical choirs, etc. was formed, and each school is to

form a cultural committee. This is geared towards democratising sport at schools.

The teachers also decided not to teach non-examination subjects, such as Physical Education, Biblical Studies, etc. They also agreed to use the June winter holidays to cover work not covered during the strike. These tasks will be a test of the ability of NEUSA to sustain the gains of the strike in concrete organisation.

Prospects for teacher unity

Whilst teachers were united in action on the ground, their organisations were not. All teachers in Soweto, Alexandra and Tembisa participated in the strike, irrespective of their organisational affiliation. NEUSA played a prominent role in the strike and has no doubt increased its membership and support amongst the teachers. Other organisations like TUATA supported the demands of the teachers, but did not agree with the strike tactic used. Instead TUATA and other organisations issued statements to indicate their support.

In the national process towards teacher unity which began in 1987 (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 1), the teachers' strike will no doubt affect the balance of forces amongst the organisations involved in the talks. By the middle of 1989, the progressive organisations involved in teacher unity (e.g. Western Cape Teachers Union, Democratic Teachers Union, Progressive Teachers League, NEUSA) had recog-

nised that their relatively small memberships did not give them much muscle in talks with organisations like UTASA and ATASA, which claimed memberships of tens-of-thousands of teachers.

The 1990 teachers' strike, coupled with the resurgence of mass democratic organisation in the townships, has shown that the issue is not so clear-cut. At least in the PWV region, it is now clear that NEUSA presents a serious organisational alternative to TUATA. However, this does not mean that sectarian rivalry between teachers' organisations is the correct path. What the strike demonstrated was that united action on the part of all teachers is the most powerful weapon at their disposal, and it is clear that teachers' organisations which foster this unity will emerge as the real leaders of South Africa's teaching corps.

The unity in action amongst the teachers will have to be maintained. This means transforming the mobilisation gains into concrete organisational gains. This is important, because many teachers were not politically motivated, but went on strike because of the material conditions of their work situation. The only way to defend the gains made is to:

- ⇒ strengthen and unify teacher organisations
- ⇒ establish the Parents Teachers Students Associations (PTSAs)
- ⇒ Improve communication with other community organisations. ☆

University workers take action

A Labour Bulletin
CORRESPONDENT
surveys the recent
upsurge in worker
action at South
Africa's universities.

The discriminatory 12% award to 'educators' (ie academic staff) earlier this year sparked off a storm of protest amongst non-academic employees at South African universities. The University of Bophuthatswana (Unibo) strike was the most dramatic, but workers also struck successfully at Natal (see page 33). At the Universities of Transkei (Unitra), Durban-Westville (UDW) and Turfloop non-academic employees were successful in gaining wage increases.

Wage demands by university manual workers - represented by NEHAWU and TGWU - at the Universities of South Africa (Unisa), Stellenbosch, Cape Town (UCT), Western Cape (UWC), and Witwatersrand (Wits) have dramatically increased basic rates in the direction of a living wage.

The demands of non-aca-

ademic staff have almost everywhere been supported by academic staff - in the case of Unitra, Unibo and Fort Hare this involved solidarity strikes from some lecturers. This obviously reflected the more politicised conditions within these homelands.

More generally, there has been increasing unity amongst the various sectors - students, academics and non-academic employees - within particularly the black universities. Another manifestation of this has been the tendency for Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA) branches at the black campuses to attract clerical and administrative staff into membership. This has happened at Fort Hare (see page 31), Unitra, Turfloop, Venda, UDW and Qwa Qwa. At Unibo, UDUSA has also incorporated manual workers, who are prevented by homeland legislation from joining 'South African' unions.

Turfloop march

On Monday 23 April, the first ever joint staff-student march took place at Turfloop. Fifteen

thousand people marched in protest against detentions of lecturers and students at the university. Nearly all employees, including administration staff and the deputy rector, took part in the march, and they were joined by school students and others in the community. The march was organised by UDUSA and the Turfloop SRC.

Strike at Unibo

A Labour Bulletin
CORRESPONDENT in
Mmabatho

"I have worked at Unibo for ten years. For ten years I have been exploited and afraid. I will retire soon. But I thank God that I lived long enough to see this day; to see the solidarity of the workers at Unibo."

The words of this elderly general worker - addressing a strike meeting - sum up the spirit of liberation which swept through the University of Bophuthatswana (Unibo) during the early months of this year. Almost all the support staff of the university, namely the manual, clerical and administrative employees, including white secretaries and departmental heads in the administration, went on strike. The majority of students gave their support, as well as a minority of academic staff. For

two weeks phones and fax machines lay idle, management were deprived of their personal secretaries, and rubbish piled up (until prison labour was brought in to deal with it). Crucial departments in the administration, like the exams, wages and the computer centre, closed completely. This was the first time that workers - rather than students and academics - had closed down a South African university.

To understand the depth of feeling and the widespread support for this strike we have to look beyond the immediate wage demand. Unibo celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. This strike was a popular revolt against ten years of discrimination against support staff; against a selfish administration which awards itself large perks and does little for the low paid; against a management which owes its first allegiance to its homeland paymasters and refuses to negotiate with its own employees.

Employee organisation at Unibo has a peculiar nature. At most universities employees are divided according to grade into separate manual, clerical/administrative and academic associations or unions. The Unibo Staff Association, however, with over 550 members, includes the majority of employees in every grade. Given Unibo's relatively small size, dividing up into smaller bodies made little sense. Furthermore, the manual workers are

prevented by homeland legislation from joining genuine trade unions. More recently, widespread antagonism to a common management has cemented the alliance of all employees across the various grades.

Background to the strike

Students and staff at Unibo have for years been subject to repression - police invasions of campus, deportations of lecturers, detentions of staff and students, mass student expulsions, and for support staff low wages and authoritarian management. There is also clear evidence of management's collusion in the repression. Indeed Unibo management is little more than an extension of homeland structures. Bophuthatswana president, Lucas Mangope, appoints the Vice-Chancellor and the majority of the University Council.

In 1988 the present Vice-Chancellor, Prof M R Malope, closed down the university, and eventually expelled hundreds of students, rather than negotiate on grievances over food and residences. It was only at the end of 1989 that student organisation - in the form of SANSCO (South African National Student Congress) - began to re-emerge on campus.

It was also in 1988 that the campaign of harassment began against the Unibo Staff Association, after it had condemned police actions on campus and called on the Vice-Chancellor to negotiate with student rep-

resentatives. *De facto* recognition of the Association - which had existed for eight years - was withdrawn, and Unibo management refused to address employee grievances presented by the Association. The University Council offered to 'approve' the Association on condition that it changed its constitution to ban all contacts with students, and to affiliate to outside bodies only with management permission. These conditions were refused by the Association, which had by then already affiliated to UDUSA (Union of Democratic University Staff Associations).

At the end of 1989 the Vice-Chancellor attempted to close down the Staff Association by banning meetings on campus and threatening to withdraw stop-order facilities. He backed down only after a massive show of solidarity from UDUSA and open defiance of the ban by members of the Association.

At the end of January this year, the president of the Staff Association, Jon Lewis, was deported from Bophuthatswana, reportedly at the request of Unibo management.* There was an immediate one day strike by staff - the first ever at Unibo - which was supported by the majority of staff and students. This was followed by daily protest meetings, pickets, and marches on campus. This culminated in a march of 1 500 academics, workers and students to the government buildings on February 14 - the

* Jon Lewis was deported from 'white' South Africa in 1987, whilst editor of the Labour Bulletin

first such action to take place in the Bop capital, Mmabatho. By the time the wage strike was called in March, employees of Unibo were already familiar with the methods of direct action.

February also witnessed mass popular uprisings against the homeland government in the eastern regions of Bophuthatswana. Even in Mmabatho, which is isolated from the main centres of resistance, street celebrations met Mandela's release, and the call for re-incorporation into South Africa grew. Rumours of planned marches spread and the authorities moved to detain (and torture) school students suspected of opposition to the regime. A large march took place in Montshiwa township and dissatisfaction was rife in the civil service.

The protests against Lewis' deportation and the later wage strike were part of the spirit of revolt sweeping Bophuthatswana (and the rest of South Africa) at the time. The authorities came to view the Unibo Staff Association as its major source of opposition in the Mmabatho area. This explains the repressive measures recently taken against the Association by the local state and Unibo management.

The Strike

On Monday March 5, Unibo management announced a 12% pay rise for academics and members of management only. A similarly discriminatory increase had occurred at the end of 1988. But this time, support staff were not willing



Staff and students at UNIBO march

Photo: Labour Bulletin correspondent

to stay silent. Three to four hundred immediately met to voice their protest, and to elect a sub-committee of the Staff Association to pursue the issue. By Wednesday midday, support staff had voted for an all-out strike until the 12% was paid to all employees. Daily sit-ins, meetings and marches followed. The character of Staff Association meetings was transformed. Where previously academics had tended to dominate, clerical and administrative workers now took turns in chairing meetings. The dominant language shifted from English to Setswana, so that the manual workers - who form the majority of the membership - now felt free to participate fully.

The majority of academics were at least sympathetic to the support staffs' demands, even though most remained at work. On Monday the 12th, a meeting of the Academic sub-committee of the Association, attended by about half of Unibo academics, voted to endorse the strikers demands. It

called on the university to open its books and for a full enquiry into the allocation of funds at Unibo. The previous day students had decided on a lecture boycott in support of the striking workers. So by the 12th, normal activity had ground to a halt and Unibo management had been effectively isolated. By this time, however, the Bop authorities had already commenced their counter-attack.

Mandla Magwetyana, Treasurer of the Staff Association, was detained, allegedly, for assisting school students in organising. The Secretary of the Association, Paul Daphne, and six other leading members of the Staff Association were subsequently detained. On the 12th the Vice-Chancellor also dismissed 443 support staff, who were subsequently locked out. On the 13th, Unibo was officially closed and the students sent home. The next day the state of emergency was extended to include the Mmabatho area, making it impossible for the strikers to

continue to meet. At the same time Mangope announced a massive 20% pay rise for all public servants - twice the going rate in the rest of South Africa! This was a transparent attempt to buy off the mounting opposition within the state bureaucracy, where strikes had already spread to the courts.

On the basis of this pay award, UDUSA and the Staff Association recommended to its members that they return to work - even though they were forced to sign new conditions of service which provide for summary dismissal if they ever strike again. The force of this threat is somewhat reduced by the knowledge that, in any case, all strikes are illegal in Bophuthatswana unless approved by the state president! The Association sees the need now to strengthen and consolidate its organisation as the best form of defence in future struggles against the management.

The significance of the strike

Progressive trade union organisation is relatively new in the university sector and has taken place along sectional lines. UDUSA organises academics and NEHAWU (National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union) and TGWU (Transport and General Workers union) organise manual and low grade workers. Higher grade clerical and administrative employees are not generally organised by the progressive organisations. The experience of the Unibo



NEHAWU and TGWU organise manual and lower grade university workers while UDUSA organises academics.

strike was that these grades were crucial to the effectiveness of the strike, and continue to be a vital source of strength within the Unibo Staff Association. The fact that these workers are costly to train and difficult to replace helps explain why Unibo management held back from wholesale victimisation after the strike.

More generally, clerical and administrative workers wield great potential power over the state, industrial, commercial and financial bureaucracies where they are employed - yet they have hardly been touched by trade unionism or are members of tame in-house associations. These workers would also have a vital role to play in any transitional or socialist econ-

omy. Clearly their material conditions differ radically to those of the majority of manual workers. But - particularly black - clerical and administrative workers also experience discrimination and other grievances at the hands of management, and their political aspirations are more likely to be those of the oppressed majority.

Within the university sector, Unibo's experience points to the possibility of greater co-operation between the different sections of employees. Indeed, with rationalisation and the squeeze on university finances, such co-operation becomes imperative if sectional squabbles are to be avoided.

Within the universities - including the liberal English-speaking institutions - huge wage differences still reflect apartheid's economic legacy. On the one hand NEHAWU and TGWU fight for large increases on basic rates of pay in order to establish a living wage for the lower grade workers. UDUSA members' interests, on the other hand, lie with percentage increases to ward off the ravages of inflation, and 'catching up exercises' to gain parity with the private sector. Clearly interests differ, but these organisations do face a common management - the local universities, the Committee of University Principals, and ultimately the state. This suggests at least the possibility of a common strategy, while taking account of the legitimate interests of the different con-

situencies. We may not have to wait for a future socialist society to begin to break down the divisions which exist in our universities. ☆

Fort Hare: once more serving the people

*Interview with
SHEPHERD MAYATULA,
vice-president of UDUSA
and a senior lecturer at
Fort Hare, by Labour
Bulletin
CORRESPONDENT*

The fall of the repressive and corrupt Ciskei regime of Lennox Sebe in March of this year also sounded the deathknell of conservative white control over the University of Fort Hare. The old management was dislodged by an alliance of all the sectors within the university community - workers, students and academics - and their organisations have effectively stepped in to ensure the continued smooth running of the university. In the process the old University Council, appointed by Sebe, was dissolved, and decisions taken by the University Senate

which did not have popular support were overturned.

Fort Hare is South Africa's oldest black university, formed in 1916, and made famous by the quality of its teaching and of its graduates. Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, and further afield, Robert Mugabe, all studied at Fort Hare. This era came to a



*Nelson Mandela - studied
at Fort Hare*

close at the end of the 1950s, when the university was brought under the control of Bantu Education. Since then Fort Hare has been governed by conservative white (mostly Afrikaner) academics who were committed to apartheid ideology. This situation continued after 1981 when the university was placed under the authority of the Ciskei government.

During this period there was systematic discrimination against black staff; at the time of the March coup, Fort Hare had only two black professors. It was also a time of repression. In 1986, over half the

student body was forced to leave after taking part in boycotts. The individual responsible for provoking the strike - the head of the History department and a major in the SADF - was subsequently promoted to the post of Vice-Rector. Organisation amongst university workers was severely disrupted by police action during 1986 and 1987, and progressive academics were constantly harassed. When Shepherd Mayatula - a senior lecturer in economics and currently Vice-President of UDUSA - was arrested and tortured by Ciskei police in 1987, the university authorities made no protest.

Interview

Salb: *How did people at Fort Hare organise in the days before the coup, given the repressive conditions?*

Mayatula: The mood changed from 1988 onwards, with a more disciplined approach to protest. In terms of organisation, the academics were previously racially divided, with a Black Staff Association and a White Staff Association. We changed the name of the Black Staff Association to the Democratic Staff Association (DSA). We were also founder members of UDUSA. The DSA organises all salaried staff including clerical and administrative employees. During this year the DSA supported non-academic staff in their struggles for higher wages.

Organisation amongst the

manual workers recovered after the repression of 1986-7. By 1989 there were well-organised strikes to improve conditions. They also affiliated to NEHAWU (National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union). The students have their own SRC. These three sectors formed an alliance which pushed out the old management at Fort Hare.

Salb: *How was this achieved?*

Mayatula: Management first realised things were not normal on March 4th, the day of the coup. The entire community of Alice, who are organised in UDF structures, gathered on campus without asking permission. There was no violence and academic life continued normally. But soon after - when the SADF were deployed throughout Ciskei - they also came to Alice, controlling the gates to the university and demanding permits. People were not willing to accept this. There was no need for it. The three sectors met and called a strike. The SADF were then withdrawn.

The DSA faced a new situation. We were not sure about the new government - the Council of State - although the UDF had stood alongside Brigadier Gqozo to re-establish order. However, feeling was strongly against the university management, which was closely identified with the fallen regime. It was decided then to go to Gqozo and to put the case against the management - before they got in first. A fur-

ther, more formal, meeting was held on 20 March at which representatives from the DSA, Council of State, South African Foreign Affairs and six members of management were present.

Later it emerged that the Rector and the other five management people who were on secondment from the DET, had already asked to be transferred back to South Africa. On the 24th the old University Council met, praised the work of the management, and asked them to stay on so that Fort Hare could stay open.

We then called for a vote of no confidence in the management and the University Council, which would be contained in a memo. The three sectors - workers, students and the DSA - each formulated reasons separately. These were then amalgamated and presented in a memo to the management, the University Council, the Council of State and the DET. A number of white staff who were not members of the DSA, also attended the meeting which adopted the memo.

At that point - on April 3rd - the management closed down the administration block for the rest of the week, and the rector and the management stayed away. This caused confusion, but the sectors used the time to debate and plan. On the week beginning the 9th the big concern was who is going to take over?

We learnt on the 12th that the Rector had removed his belongings from campus, and was now living in Fort Beau-

fort with the other five management figures, 21km away. Attempts to remove files from campus were prevented. The Dean of Commerce, Prof Brian Gardiner, was proposed by the three sectors as a caretaker rector. He was also acceptable to senior academic staff in Senate, and he was leaving in June - so he was ideal for a stand-in.

However, when the Senate met on 17 April, Prof J R Seretlo was already in the chair, having been suddenly appointed Second Vice-Rector by the University Council. He was Fort Hare's only black dean, but had sided with the old management. The majority of white senators seemed to believe that any black face would be acceptable, and voted that he be accepted and allowed to act for the rector. The DSA senators pointed out that the other structures on campus had not been consulted, and that without their support it would be impossible to normalise the situation.

The Senate took a firm stand over the rector and the other five management figures who were still claiming to run the university from Fort Beaufort - and demanded their employment be stopped.

The three sectors then met and decided to block Seretlo's appointment, since it meant accepting him as acting rector. On the 18th he was informed that he was unacceptable because of his association with the old Council, because he had accepted the post without consultation, and because he was not a part of the DSA. He

would receive no co-operation from us and he was advised to stand down. The next day Seretlo resigned and we were back to square one. So the DSA has again called for Senate to nominate Prof Gardiner as stand-in rector.

Salb: *What stand has the new government taken over the struggles going on within the university?*

Mayatula: People on the Council of State were shocked that black staff were not catered for at the university. In fact they agreed to scrap the old Act governing the university and to form a new University Council. We were asked to propose names for the new Council. Nominations include Archbishop Tutu, Allen Boesak and Govan Mbeki. The Council of State at first accepted Seretlo's nomination - but when we explained why he was unacceptable they understood.

Salb: *What is the relationship of the progressive organisations at Fort Hare to the broader community?*

Mayatula: In terms of political organisation the manual workers are part of NEHAWU and COSATU and through that are linked to the wider structures of the MDM. Amongst the students some are BC (black consciousness) but SANSCO (South African National Student Congress) is dominant and is linked to UDF structures in the community.

The DSA has always been

more cautious and has not taken a stand on formal links - although some members would support such a step. In addition, under the new Act, the new Council will include much greater representation from the community. COSATU and (National Federated Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC) are to be represented.

We have already opened up the facilities at Fort Hare to the community. Recently an athletics meeting was held and attended by all Ciskei's tertiary institutions. That would never have happened under the old management.

Salb: *What is the significance of the recent events for the people who work and study at Fort Hare?*

Mayatula: It means that we have become a people's university - serving the people, reflecting their needs - along the lines of the University of the Western Cape. Because of its history and the people who have studied here, there is a great deal of goodwill towards Fort Hare. It rings bells going back to the 1930s. The changes mean that we can present a whole new face to the world which links up to past achievements.

You can already feel the new spirit. Previously people were ready to strike and protest. Now the feeling is this is our university - we control it; we must build it up and defend it. We are part of a family, a community which looks after its members. We have to sit

down and decide how to divide the cake between us. We look forward to building a university worthy of Fort Hare's achievements in the past. ☆

Workers at UND strike for higher wages

Report by F KATHREE, P LALU, C BOLDOGH and K MDLALOSE of the Black Students Society Labour Committee

Workers at University of Natal, Durban (UND) went on a two-days strike during the first week of April, after the university administration refused to grant a 30% wage increase. Although the administration did not give in to the wage demand, a number of short-term demands were won. These were:

- The present offer of 18% to be back-dated to 1 January instead of 1 April
- Workers are to receive full pay for the two days they were on strike
- Negotiations on what constitute a living wage
- The administration to meet with Joint Academic Staff Association (JASA) to discuss the issue of disparity in wage increases
- That the administration

guarantees that workers and students are not victimised for supporting or participating in the strike.

The militancy of workers that insured these victories, also destroyed the myth of an affirmative action policy adhered to by the university.

Building democracy and alliances

The strike, and the process leading to the decision to go on strike, was conducted in very democratic manner. There were mass forums or assemblies, regular report backs, accountable leadership, debates and discussions which brought workers into the fold of participatory democracy, drawing them into a world of decision-making and struggle.

The strike drew in the support of other sectors of the university community, which presented the opportunity to form a united front against the administration. There was a consistent struggle waged to consolidate the worker-student alliance. The alliance gave meaning to the slogan, 'An injury to one is an injury to all'.

The two day action also drew on the limited support of the academics. Many academics showed their disapproval of uneven wage increases. This gave student and worker representatives ammunition in their negotiations with the administration. The strike laid the foundation for unity between various sectors.

The TGWU proved to be the only union on campus capable of uniting workers and

fighting for their demands. They succeeded in drawing workers away from NASA (Non-Academic Staff Association) and Black Workers Organisation (BWO), an UWUSA affiliate.



Shortcomings

Some of the shortcomings of the strike were:

Firstly, whilst a significant section of the student population demonstrated in solidarity with workers, many abstained. The spontaneous nature of the strike caught student organisations unawares. However, preparations to mobilise student support for worker demands were needlessly made at the last minute.

Students need to extract many lessons from the struggle of the workers on campus. Workers have demonstrated that freedom can only be guaranteed by seriousness, commitment and maximum participation in democratic organisations. Students who adopt a lazy attitude towards struggle are little different to parasites living off the fruits of others hard-won victories.

Secondly, there was an absence of political education. It

is not enough to chant slogans and *toyi-toyi*. The strike created the space for workshops and discussions - something that a normal day does not allow for. For example a workshop could have been organised around the issue of the Natal violence - an issue that affects both students and workers. Here students, who enjoy ample access to resources, and organisers of the strike need to be criticised.

Finally, the action was concentrated at the Durban Branch of the campus, leaving Pietermaritzburg campus almost unaffected. This situation needs to be remedied before new forms of action are embarked upon.

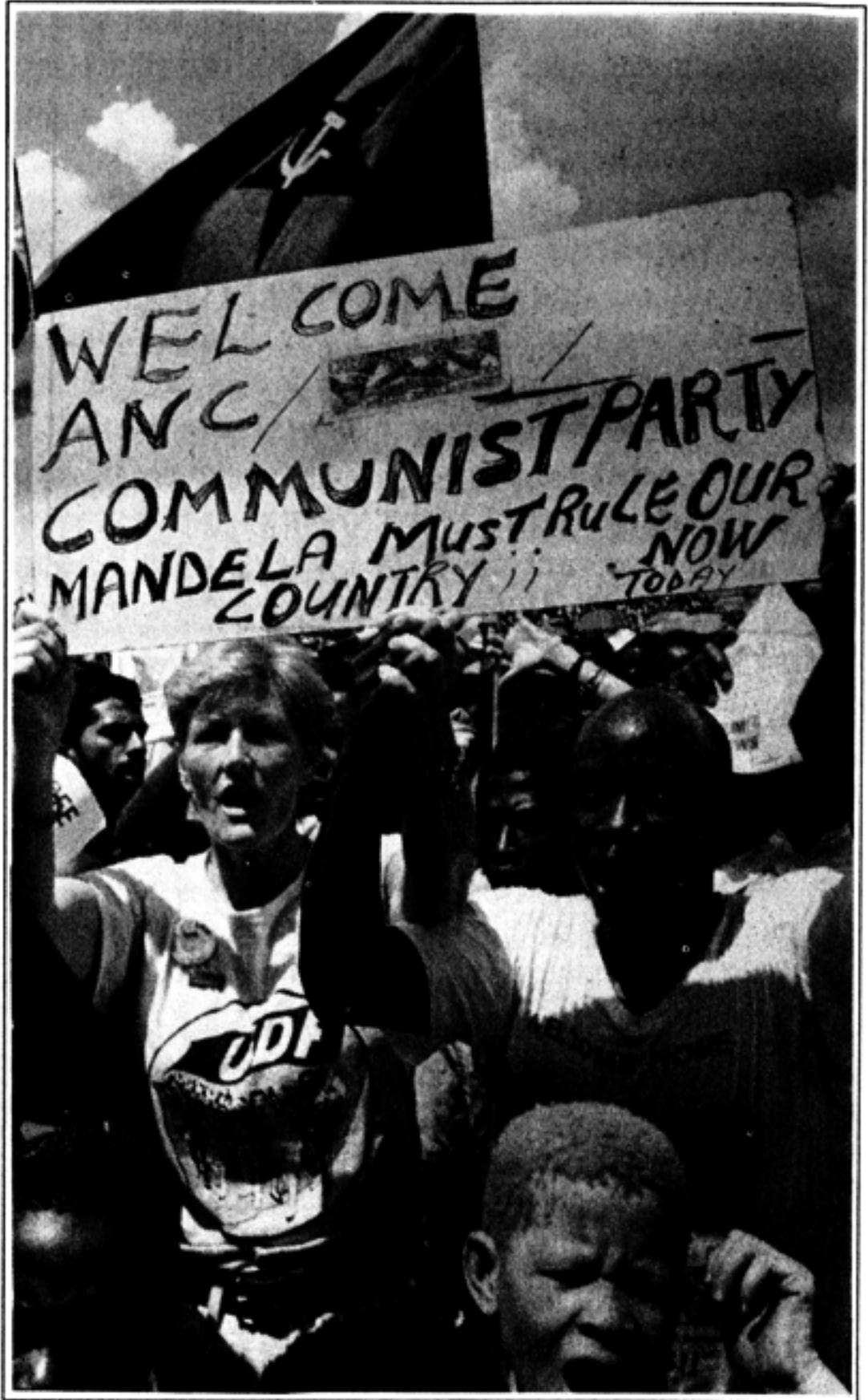
United action for a living wage

The strike demonstrated to the workers the power they can wield if they are united and determined to win their demands. It also bridged the gap between the workers on campus and the struggle of the working class in general. The strike cultivated a culture of militant struggle amongst the workers. Together with students workers stood united as comrades, demanding a living wage. ☆

Interview with Joe Slovo

Joe Slovo speaks about building a legal, mass Communist Party, about post-apartheid South Africa, about socialism and social democracy, and about theoretical issues in Marxism. Slovo also discusses his paper, *Has socialism failed?*,* which, he says "was written essentially for discussion within our own party and broad liberation movement, but it seems also to have provoked a lot of interest within our Southern Africa region and in Europe". *LABOUR BULLETIN* and the magazine *NEW ERA* interviewed Joe Slovo separately.** We publish the combined interview.

Photo: Anna Zieminski



Labour Bulletin: *The SA Communist Party intends emerging publicly in the coming months, and actively recruiting thousands of new members. Under such conditions would it be a vanguard party or a mass party? Would new members be selected according to rigorous criteria, or would individuals be able to apply for membership?*

Slovo: We envisage a large party. We have to break out of

the old conspiratorial mold. We have got to make an impact in the situation, and only a political party which attracts a wide cross-section of the working class nationally, in particular, and other sympathetic strata, can carry out its role. In building an above-board SACP that will be able to earn its title of vanguard, we will certainly seek to recruit into our ranks the most dedicated, disciplined militants drawn, in particular, from the

* Published in full in *Labour Bulletin* 14.6

** *New Era* sent questions to Slovo. Gavin Evans interviewed Slovo in Lusaka for *Labour Bulletin*.

ranks of the working people. But our continued emphasis on a vanguard role, and on quality in our membership, must not stand in the way of building a relatively large SACP.

There is no doubt that people who want to join the party are welcome to make approaches. Indeed, even during the illegal period we did not simply sit back and select who to approach. It was a combination of that, and initiatives taken by individuals. In this new situation the emphasis will be to encourage all the sectors who we think have a place in the party, to actually find a home in the party. We encourage them to take initiatives to come into the party.

I wouldn't draw such a sharp distinction between a vanguard party (properly understood) and a mass party. I believe the now-legal SACP must continue to play a vanguard role - in the sense that it must seek to mobilise, organise and educate working people by representing their immediate and long-term interests through all the twists and turns of the struggle.

The concept of the vanguard has been degraded in practise by two tendencies. The one is the shifting of the party's vanguard role from the working class to society as a whole. Once the party claims to be the vanguard of society at large, it's a short step to a constitutionally entrenched one-party system.

In the second place, the concept of the party's vanguard role had, in many cases, shifted away from the idea that this role must be based on a

renewable mandate from a working class that is mobilised and active.

Labour Bulletin: *Would you welcome a range of people on the left, for example those holding social democratic views and those holding Trotskyist views? Would people who are of various religious faiths who hold left-wing views be welcome in the party?*

Slovo: We must move away from the old label approach, which dismissed people on the basis of a generalised characterisation of their politics. We've had a rather murky past in that respect, we've been a bit arrogant, we've been a little elitist, we've been a little intolerant. We are trying to break out of that mold and I think we've gone a long way in that direction.

But at the same time, the party cannot just be a rag-bag of conflicting tendencies. I believe that there is a place in our party for socialists, whoever they are and whatever their background is and whatever differences they had with us in the past, as long as they accept the programme of our party, broadly speaking, and its policies. I would say that in our revolutionary practice of the recent period, we have been more tolerant of trends and tendencies which in the past we might have dismissed as counter-revolutionary.

Even internally, within the party, we have to encourage a greater degree of debate, even on existing party policy. In-

deed, we have to involve the broad working class movement in the debate about party policy, and we must welcome that. Also within the party we must, I believe, tolerate a certain degree of constructive dissent.

But like any other party there has to be a degree of cohesion, otherwise it becomes impotent as a political force. I am not suggesting we just become a debating society. I am suggesting there is more scope for debate, for discussion, and for what I call constructive dissent, as long as the basic party thrust is not undermined.

Labour Bulletin: *Would the SACP oppose the formation of another political party claiming to be socialist?*

Slovo: As for those who want to form other parties, it is up to them. Our task is to engage them ideologically and to compete for the allegiance of the working people, but not to prevent their formation either by old style sloganising or, if it reaches the point of political power, by dictating through the constitution that our party is the only party that has the right to exist.

Labour Bulletin: *Will the SACP surface its underground structures, and make its membership publicly known?*

Slovo: For the moment we are not surfacing our underground structures. This is a precautionary measure in a

still uncertain situation. It is a matter which we will hold under constant review. But certainly, in organisational terms, our emphasis will now be on building a mass, above-board party whose membership is not secret.

Labour Bulletin: *How do the distinct tasks of the SACP and the ANC play themselves out in an era of legal mass politics?*

Slovo: In the unfolding situation our party's role as a vital constituent of the liberation alliance headed by the ANC, and as an independent organisation pursuing the aspirations of the working class, is becoming more crucial than ever.

The ANC will remain the overall head of the broad national liberation movement whose task in the immediate aftermath of victory will be to consolidate our liberation objectives. We need now to build an ANC of massive strength, and every party militant must help to make this a reality.

In the building of a mass-based ANC it is inevitable that some strata with their own agenda will flock into its ranks and will, consciously or otherwise, seek to steer it away from its working class bias. We should be ready for an inevitable sharpening of inter-class ideological contest in the run-up to victory and in its immediate aftermath. This is not an argument for narrowing the base of the ANC. It is an argument for consolidating and massively extending our party and the trade union

movement as independent forces and as part of the liberations alliance.

Labour Bulletin: *Some left-wing critics of the liberation movement fear that the ANC seeks to develop an indigenous black bourgeoisie and to foster that, so that the ownership of the economy is not solely in white hands. Trade unionists also point out that many black business-people are among the worst employers of labour. How do you see this issue?*

Slovo: It is not the policy, either of the SACP or the ANC, to foster a black bourgeoisie. Our policy on that question is based on the national democratic platform. Blacks have been prevented from participating in the pri-



Sam Motsuenyane of the National Federated Chambers of Commerce (NAFCOC) - black business people must not be disadvantaged, but we don't want to see black exploiters replacing white exploiters

Photo: Paul Weinberg/Afrapix

vate sector. It is consistent with our broad social vision to demand the repeal of legislation and the creation of conditions in which, during the period when there will be a private sector, blacks are not disadvantaged.

It does not follow from this that we have embarked on a deliberate policy to try to replace the white exploiters with black exploiters. In fact, if that happens, the fruits of victory will have been hijacked, and the majority of people will not benefit from their sacrifices in the struggle.

Labour Bulletin: *How does the SACP see the role of the trade union movement in a post-apartheid South Africa? One can foresee a number of problems for organised workers. Firstly, SA will probably have to work hard to attract foreign investment. A militant, highly organised trade union movement could scare investors off - could this mean trade unions having to accept a wage freeze or other compromises?*

Secondly, the economy is unlikely to be able to meet the demands of the organised workers at the same time as it provides jobs and housing for the unemployed, the squatters etc. Resources will also have to be diverted from the urban areas to the countryside, which may clash with the demands of organised workers. How can this problem be dealt with, and what role should the unions play?

Slovo: That depends upon the dominant nature of the post-apartheid state. If it is

truly a People's State the trade unions will have to take all the factors that you mention into account. The trade union movement will be part of the new People's State and it must have a real stake in it, and feel that it is theirs.

A People's State would be dedicated to the interests of the majority, who are working people, and to moving towards a redistribution of wealth, and to social advancement generally, rather than to private profit. Under those conditions we'll obviously have to take into account many, many complexities, including the ones you mention, in order to make advance viable.

Labour Bulletin: *What is the role of the Communist Party in relation to trade unions, and the working class more generally, in this new era of legal politics, and in a post-apartheid situation?*

Slovo: Obviously there must be a very very close link between the workers' party and the industrial organisation of the working class, the trade union movement. One does not replace the other, both are absolutely indispensable. Together they represent the working class constituency. They represent the political and industrial power of the working class, and the political and industrial aspirations of the working class.

So I envisage a situation in which the working class constituency, consisting of these political and industrial organs, may well continue to be part of

A Leadership Code

Labour Bulletin: *It is of major concern that there has been corruption and loss of funds in a number of mass organisations, trade unions, etc. How do you think these problems can be tackled, and how can corruption be controlled in a democratic SA?*

Slovo: There should be a leadership code. It's absolutely vital now that we get thinking about a leadership code. Conditions are going to deteriorate for some time immediately after the ANC comes to power. People are going to have to sacrifice. I think people can take a lot - I feel very strongly about this - people can accept hardship if they are convinced politically that we are moving in the right direction.

But if the leadership lives it up, if we all go back and start occupying big houses in wealthy suburbs, there is no way we can get the people to accept the sacrifices involved in laying the foundations for the future.

This is another major lesson to be derived from the events in Eastern Europe. A different style of life for the leadership is fatal. If the leadership is living as a privileged elite, you can hardly expect the broad masses of people to accept the objective necessity of transitional hardships on the way to real redistribution and transformation.

In my opinion it is imperative that our broad liberation movement begins now to develop an effective leadership code of conduct that seeks to counter any tendencies towards elitism. ☆

the process of consolidating the national democratic revolution. But they will also have to look to the interests of their constituency, to ensure that they can exercise sufficient power independently in this inter-class relationship, to ensure that the bias of the national democratic revolution is towards the interests of the working people, the majority.

Labour Bulletin: *With Mandela's release and statements on nationalisation, a*

major debate has raged in the press. You have been quoted as saying that the aim of economic policy will be the redistribution of wealth, and that this does not mean that "sectors of the economy would have to be nationalised" (Business Day); and also that the more important question is one of "control, not ownership", that sectors of the economy "have got to be taken under control which I distinguish from state control". Could you elaborate on these questions?

Slovo: We must distinguish between a legal change of ownership from private hands to the state and the process of what I called socialisation. Nationalisation in the sense of a simple change of ownership without taking steps to ensure democratic participation by the producers at all levels of economic life does not necessarily advance the socialist objective.

Socialism is a transition period, a moving from one economic reality to another. When power is taken, the previous economic reality doesn't completely disappear. The new power can use many different mechanisms in order to begin the process of redistribution of wealth. Nationalisation is not a catch-all solution for the problem of social ownership. Of course, in our case, there will have to be a degree of nationalisation. But as a universal formula for the whole of the economy, the purely legal transfer of ownership to the state does not mean we can assure the redistribution of wealth. There has been quite a high degree of nationalisation within capitalism, and we know how the nationalised industries were used. We should try to refine our understanding of nationalisation so that its purpose and its relationship to effective popular control is emphasised. And even in relation to the transfer of legal ownership, the question as to whether it is a complete take-over, whether compensation is or isn't going to be given, will have to be determined by the reality of

the correlation of forces at that moment in time.

Labour Bulletin: *Mandela said these things are negotiable. Would you agree?*

Slovo: Quite a number of things are negotiable, but what isn't negotiable is that the new power which takes over must be able to generate the resources to meet the imbalances of the past, the racial imbalances. It must be able to achieve effective control over the direction of the economy, for the purpose of beginning to redistribute wealth. Redistributing wealth cannot take place in the form of some big bang, it's a process which must be rooted in the actual reality.

Labour Bulletin: *The path of socialist orientation of national democratic states was based on the existence of a socialist world system into which such national democracies could slot. Perestroika has laid to rest the idea of a socialist world system, stressing instead an integrated world economy. Could you comment on this, and its meaning for South Africa's future?*

Slovo: Because of economic failure, the reality is that there is little left of what we used to call a world socialist economic system. Socialism has, for the moment, proved incapable of competing with the world capitalist sector, for reasons I outlined in *Has Socialism Failed?* - essentially because of various distortions of so-

cialism. This means that we cannot premise future advance in South Africa in the medium term on some kind of integration into a socialist world economy. It is difficult at this stage to speculate on precise policies we will need to pursue. But there are some basic principles that we must already grasp firmly.

In the first place, we will have to cultivate a spirit of self-reliance, a confidence in the necessity of finding our own way. The overwhelming dominance on a world scale of the capitalist sector presents dangers and complexities. We can neither ignore these realities, nor must we become fatalistic. We will have options and room for manoeuvre.

Our country is, after all, not without many significant resources and our working people are mobilised and politically conscious. The challenge will be to safeguard the sovereignty of our people and our right to move in the right direction. If capital says: "Right, we are no longer prepared to invest because of the social direction you are following", we can neither ignore the fact, nor can we allow it to dominate our policies.

We must also prepare to weather certain inevitable disruptions. All social transformations bring with them such disruptions. The likely hostility of sectors of capital to even moderate measures which we will have to take in order to begin the basic redistribution of wealth will contribute to these disruptions. The only way to cope

with a transitional period of dislocation is to take the people with you politically.

Labour Bulletin: *The expectations which abound in youth and trade union circles about socialism seem out of touch with what will be objectively possible. What problems does this disjuncture between rhetoric and reality pose for the future?*

Slovo: Mass worker support and enthusiasm for socialism is an entirely positive factor in our struggle. With the possibilities now opened up by our legalisation, the SACP will be working to extend and deepen this support.

Leaving aside ideological frills, the average worker and youth militant in our country has perhaps a more profound grasp of the utility of a socialist future than many a Marxist scholar. The working people of our country understand the basic truth that, as long as a system based on private profit rules the roost, substantial inroads into resolving their major concerns - housing, education, employment, healthcare, social security - will not be possible.

A national democratic victory is an essential step forward, a basis for advance, but we should not by our silences project it as the end of the road. It is crucial that we propagate a socialist perspective now - which is not to say that we can pole-vault into socialism immediately.

Labour Bulletin: *The Path to Power underplays the*

failures of socialism, and gives the most cursory attention to perestroika. This is redressed by Has Socialism Failed?, but the two documents do not sit happily alongside each other. Would the acceptance of the perspective in Has Socialism Failed? not necessitate a rewriting of the party programme?

Slovo: Our party programme endorses the processes of perestroika and glasnost, and notes some of the historical failures of socialism. In this sense, there is no basic contradiction in the perspective between the programme and *Has Socialism Failed?*

There is also convergence of viewpoint between the two documents in relation to such crucially important issues as the nature of the vanguard party and the necessary link of democracy to socialism.

But of course there are some differences in emphasis. These relate as much as anything to the fact that *Has Socialism Failed?* takes on a single, focused question and that it is an individual contribution. It should also be remembered that almost a year separates the publication of the two different documents, and that the programme was collective endeavour based on discussions throughout our ranks over more than a year before our 7th Congress.

A lot has happened in the last twelve and twenty-four months, and a lot more information has come to hand. But, yes, of course, our party must certainly be alive to the possi-

bility of a revised edition of the programme. Not only because of events elsewhere, but most importantly because of the rapidly changing situation within our country.

For the moment, *The Path to Power* remains an important analysis and guide to action. Its perspectives have been confirmed since its adoption last year.

Labour Bulletin: *Although Has Socialism Failed? has elicited great excitement and relief, there has been disquiet about certain silences and perceived weaknesses in the paper. In particular, the constant assertion of the moral and even economic superiority of socialism is not supported by any evidence. As the paper shows, existing socialism, despite its achievements, has certainly not proved an all-round superiority. What actual, historical realities do you have in mind when you assert the inherent superiority of socialism?*

Slovo: Well, very briefly, capitalism has been around for nearly five centuries, but it has failed to meet some of the most basic aspirations of humankind. Today it has projected its internal contradictions onto a global stage, bringing abject squalor into the lives of the great majority of the world's inhabitants, specifically in the countries of the Third World.

Turning to the societies of existing socialism (and let us not forget that in world-historical terms, socialism is in its

The women's question

Labour Bulletin: *A question that has been stressed recently in Umsebenzi, but is not really touched on at all in The Path to Power, is that of the role of women. It does seem that the SACP has emphasised this question more than other organisations of the liberation movement. Is this a gap in The Path to Power, is it something that needs to be stressed, do you think, in particular?*

Slovo: Looking at *The Path to Power*, we must concede that it is a gap. But we are, as you have said, aware of it and we have started deliberately to place it high on the agenda and our general ideological output. In the first place the problem has to be tackled within the organisations themselves, including the party. We are not going to solve the women's problem in society as political parties unless we get rid of what unfortunately continues to exist internally. There is a degree of male chauvinism, a sort of lip-service being paid to the concept of women's participation on an equal basis. In practice much, much more has to be done to make women's equality a reality. ☆

infancy), there have been immense problems. There have been some truly horrendous subjective errors.

There have also been enormous objective difficulties. With the possible exception of Czechoslovakia and the partial exception of the German Democratic Republic, we have yet to witness an attempt to build socialism in a country with even a moderately developed pre-existing economic base, or in which there is at least a pre-existing bourgeois democratic political culture.

Despite all of this, existing socialism has thrown up in its partial, half-realised achievements, evidence of its potential in such vital areas as the quest for world peace, social se-

curity, health, education, full employment, and so on.

One example: the literacy rate in underdeveloped Cuba is higher than in the most developed capitalist country, the United States; the infant mortality rate in Havana is lower than in Washington DC.

Labour Bulletin: *In his book, Perestroika, Gorbachev asserts that while the profit/market mechanism provides the dynamic in capitalism which constantly advances technology and production techniques, socialism has developed no such mechanism. Many economists in the socialist countries insist that perestroika will not succeed unless the market comes to play an even greater role*

relative to the plan. The dividing line between socialism and social democracy, it seems, is being blurred because of economic necessity. In this respect, Has Socialism Failed? is relatively silent. It asserts that the basics of socialism remain valid, and that it was the lack of democracy that resulted in distortions. But the failure of the planned economy was not simply because of the absence of democracy.

Slovo: The essence of socialism is not the plan per se. Socialism is a transitional phase, on the way to communism, in which the means of production are increasingly owned and controlled socially, and in which the working people are politically empowered. Socialist planning must be designed to progressively advance this process.

In relation to capitalism, the core of Marx's scientific breakthrough was precisely to uncover, beneath the appearance of the capitalist free market, the essential mechanisms of class exploitation.

The difference between socialism and capitalism lies in the critical difference between different relations of production the one non-exploitative, the other based root and branch on class exploitation. The dominant role of the free market under capitalism is designed to keep exploitative relations in place.

The contrast between the plan and market must be seen in this context. On the one hand, no modern economy -

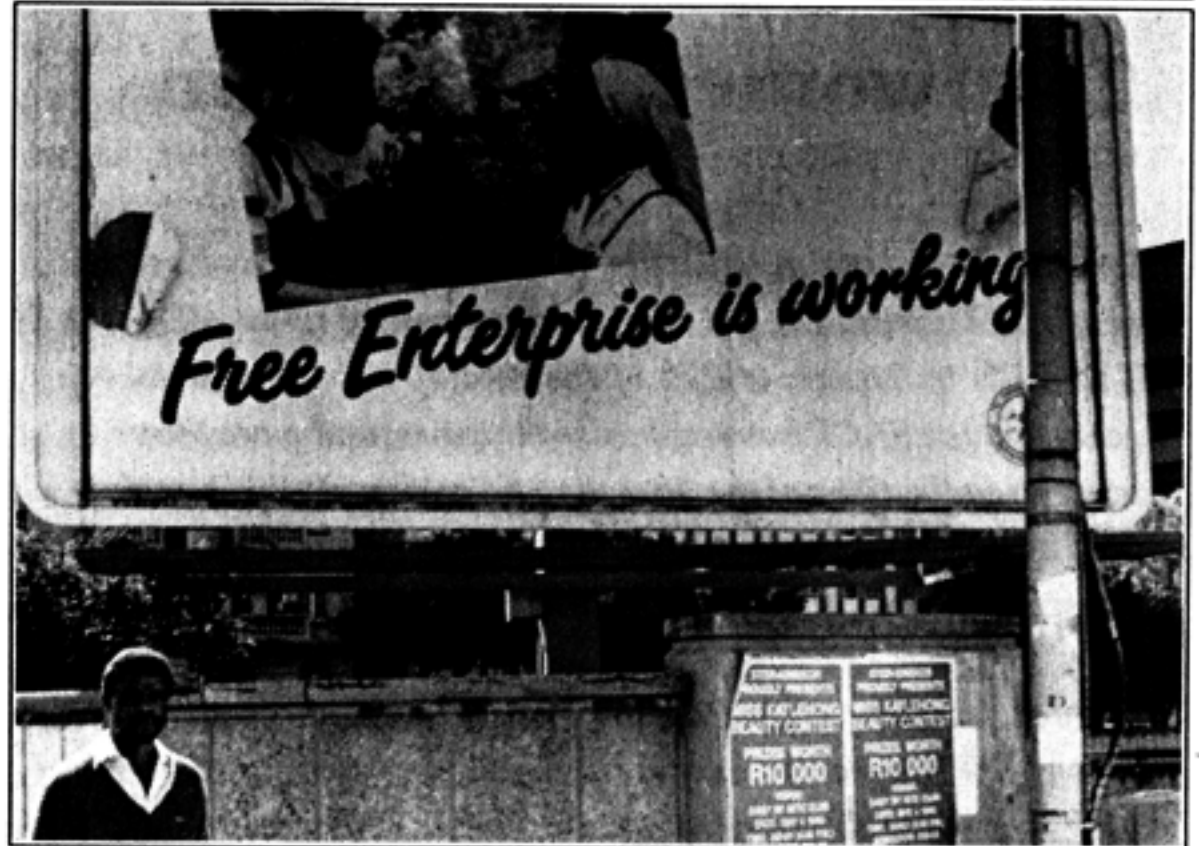
INTERVIEW

capitalist or socialist - can function without some degree of centralised planning. On the other hand, capitalism can claim no monopoly on markets. Markets existed historically a long time before the advent of capitalism. And within existing socialist countries, as you note, there is now a much more realistic appreciation of the positive role the market mechanism can play in certain important areas.

Another problem which is being addressed is the premature elimination of different forms of property and a mechanical approach to egalitarianism in under-developed economic conditions. Neither of these correctives constitute a flirtation with capitalism if they do not result in the re-introduction of a system of exploitation.

The economic restructuring occurring, for instance, under perestroika in the Soviet Union is according a much greater role to the market mechanism in the relationship between different socialist production units (factories, farms, power stations etc.). It is also according a much greater role to the market mechanism in the relationship between productive units and the consumers.

A committee of bureaucrats in Moscow will no longer attempt in some five-year plan to decree the quantity of shoes required from each individual factory. The effectiveness of a shoe factory will no longer be determined simply by its ability to produce a certain gross quantity of shoes regardless of quality, style or demand



Free marketeers - no solution for poverty in South Africa

Photo: Morice Smithers/Labour Bulletin

- but by its ability, on the market, to respond to, and even anticipate, the needs and preferences of the people.

I fail to understand how, or why, any of this constitutes a slippage into capitalism or social democracy. It would only be so if the adoption of the market mechanism was calculated to re-introduce a system of exploitation of person by person.

It is also important to realise that the concept of economic planning itself is not flawed simply because planning of the commandist bureaucratic kind has failed. There is no way, for instance, that in a liberated South Africa the immense socio-economic problems of housing, employment, education and health-care can begin to be addressed without a significant degree of central economic planning, although such planning should be flexible and democratic.

On the global plane, the major socio-economic challenges confronting humanity, for example the massive debt-

burden and the dangerous trade imbalance between North and South, the destruction of the environment, the need to redirect nuclear technology to peaceful ends, the grave threat posed by the spread of certain infectious diseases like AIDS - all of these cannot be solved simply by the play of free market forces.

The freemarketeers like to present themselves as the very latest word in economic rationality. In fact, measured against the challenges of the modern world, it is the freemarketeers who are the ones lost in a time-warp.

Labour Bulletin: *But can you confidently assert that socialism is economically and morally superior to social democracy? The poorest sector of the population in the social democracies enjoys a better standard of living than the poorest in the socialist countries, and seems to have had greater democracy too.*

Slovo: In the past, communists have been guilty of treating social democracy as an undifferentiated whole. We have often failed to distinguish between different strands in social democracy. For example, you can't simply equate a Tony Benn (who really wants socialism) with a Harold Wilson.* We should concede that social democracy is part of a broader tradition in the quest for socialism.

Our old blanket terms for social democracy - "traps of imperialism", "traitors to the working class" - must be discarded. I believe that this new perception of social democracy opens the way for some form of collaboration between social democratic forces and communist forces.

There are important positive features of social democracy that must be noted. Social democrats have generally paid greater attention, at least theoretically, than we have to the vital connection between socialism and democracy.

The social democrats, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, have played an enormously important international solidarity role, not least in regard to our own struggle.

In power, social democrats have made positive contributions to ameliorating the conditions of workers within the context of capitalism.

But this "within" remains the operative word. Everywhere, in its practical application, social democracy

has not really addressed the question of changing the relations of production.

If socialism means anything it is summed up in the objective of working to end the exploitation of one person by another. There is no example in history where social democracy has gained power and has, in fact, seriously tried to bring about such a transformation.

The positive economic achievements to which you refer must also be contextualised. The relatively positive examples of social democracy are all to be found in the advanced, industrialised countries of the North. Some of the advantages enjoyed in these countries are not unconnected to the wider imperialist international division of labour.

Above all, the major trend within social democracy has been to look upon bourgeois electoral institutions as the last word in democracy. While parliaments and other such representative institutions are important, this is an exceedingly limited view of democracy. It needs to be complemented with another socialist tradition of democracy.

It is a tradition that we need to re-discover in a certain sense. I am thinking of the tradition of direct democracy, celebrated in Marx's writing on the Paris Commune and in Lenin's reflections on the Soviets or popular councils that emerged spontaneously in 1905 and again in 1917.

This popular power tradi-

tion of democracy does not entail the rejection of elected, state institutions, but it extends the notion of democracy far beyond the limits of the liberal (and social democratic) tradition. It calls for the fostering of many centres of power outside of the state, in a host of sectorial organisations, local associations, popular militias, special interest campaigns, etc. In this tradition (a tradition with strong echoes in South Africa's recent mass struggles) socialist state power (exercised through elected, representative institutions) and popular power are complementary. They check and balance each other.

It is along these directions that we need to move in building a fully democratic society. By contrast, the limited parliamentarism, which has become more and more the dominant trend within social democracy, carries with it all the familiar anti-democratic dangers of wheeling and dealing between political elites, of unprincipled compromise and bureaucratism.

Labour Bulletin: *You make the distinction between socialist relations of production and capitalist relations. Given the economic changes in the existing socialist countries, what do you mean by 'socialist relations of production'?*

Slovo: Essentially, socialist relations of production must result in the ending of exploi-

* Tony Benn is a left-wing member of the British Labour Party. Harold Wilson was the leader of that Party, and Prime Minister of Britain, in the 1960s and 1970s.

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exploitation of person by person, which ultimately can only be brought about by the complete socialisation of the means of production, and by socialisation I mean social ownership and full democratic participation by workers.

Labour Bulletin: *What are the implications of the current crisis in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for our understanding of socialism? Is the reversion to a mixed economy, with market forces, private ownership and employed wage labour, and an increasing class-differentiation, a phase in the development of socialism, or a permanent feature of socialism? If the latter, can one talk about the ultimate withering away of classes and a classless society? Can one still talk of communism?*

Slovo: I think these are what I've tried to describe as phases within socialism itself, transition phases within the transitional system of socialism. We must bear in mind that there's no Chinese wall between systems.

The premature elimination of all inherited economic forms - which includes the existence of the market and the commodity and so on - is an obstacle to actually building socialism. And the presence of hired labour in the private sector does not contradict the process if society as a whole is predominantly socialised, and is moving towards complete socialisation. The reversion that we are witnessing now il-



A march for democracy in Moscow - confidence in socialism has been badly shaken by events in Eastern Europe. The SACP felt it was imperative to open discussion of these events.

Photo: Moscow News

lustrates a corrective to what was done previously. It is not a retreat to capitalism, it's an attempt to compensate because those elements which in fact were inherited from the previous system were prematurely eliminated.

It's clear that socialism as a transition to communism, is

not premised on egalitarianism, although it must of course move consistently to advance egalitarianism. The move towards greater egalitarianism, when the productive forces are backward, is also an obstacle to building socialism.

Labour Bulletin: *They*

moved too quickly?

Slovo: They moved too quickly - I think they're admitting that now.

Labour Bulletin: *Has socialism failed? asserts that despite the problems of actually existing socialism, "the theory of Marxism remains valid in all essential respects", and that the problems have been caused by "distortions and misapplications." Is it possible to draw such a clear line between the classical writings and the problems of existing socialism?*

Slovo: Marxism is not a sort of do-it-yourself kit. It's merely a tool which you can use either well or badly, and my point is that the tool is not faulty when it is misapplied or used by a faulty workman.

Lenin's prescriptions in the early days were valid for the party during the period of illegality. It was also valid for the situation of counter-revolutionary encirclement of the new state soon after the revolution. Even in the so-called Western democracies, it's accepted that during moments of tension and danger, as during the last war, you cannot have the abstract application of democratic forms. But the danger for us, and this is a danger which manifested itself subsequently, is that the limitation of democratic practice continues long after the situation no longer justifies it.

Labour Bulletin: *The writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin are extremely inadequate on the question of the*

socialist state and political democracy. Could these very inadequacies be seen as opening the way for Stalinist and anti-democratic conceptions of the state?

Lenin's What is to be done? is probably the most widely read and influential text of Marxism-Leninism. It is quite dismissive of concerns for democracy.

Slovo: My reading of the classics is that they are steeped in democracy, in the aspiration to achieve a form of society in which the individual will have maximum potential for expressing himself or herself. I do not believe that the distortions which emerged in existing socialism are necessarily inherent in any of the classical writers. There are moments in Lenin, when he was dealing with a particular crisis in a particular situation, where he opposed, in that situation, application of democratic norms.

I believe this is not necessarily a retreat from the basic content of Marxism on the question of democracy, but reflects a moment. In our own movement during the illegal period, we were forced to work in similar conditions. One could say that there was an absence of accountability, of democracy in its full meaning, but I believe that the limitation was brought about by the objective conditions, and was justified.

Labour Bulletin: *Marx argued strongly that capitalism contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and that its supersession by so-*

cialism was virtually inevitable. In the light of current developments there seems to be little evidence for this.

Slovo: I believe in general we can hold to the proposition that capitalism has within it the seeds of its own destruction. But Marxist scholars need to examine the assertion made by Marx and others, that the point had been reached where capitalist relations of production were now a complete obstacle to the development of capitalist productive forces. The technological revolution has demonstrated that, as a bland proposition, that certainly wasn't the case.

Labour Bulletin: *Is there any inevitability about this? Couldn't one argue that capitalism has shown that it has within it the seeds of its own reproduction?*

Slovo: I think that capitalism has got within it the seeds of its own reproduction in certain historical periods. The fault lay in assuming that the historical period had ended in the early 20th century, and that capitalism would inevitably now be on the decline. I think it's that proposition as a historic fact that has got to be re-examined. New factors emerged within capitalist forms of production, which made it possible for capitalism to make the advances which it undoubtedly has made.

Labour Bulletin: *One of the legacies of Stalinism was a dogmatic and almost religious attitude to the classical authors*

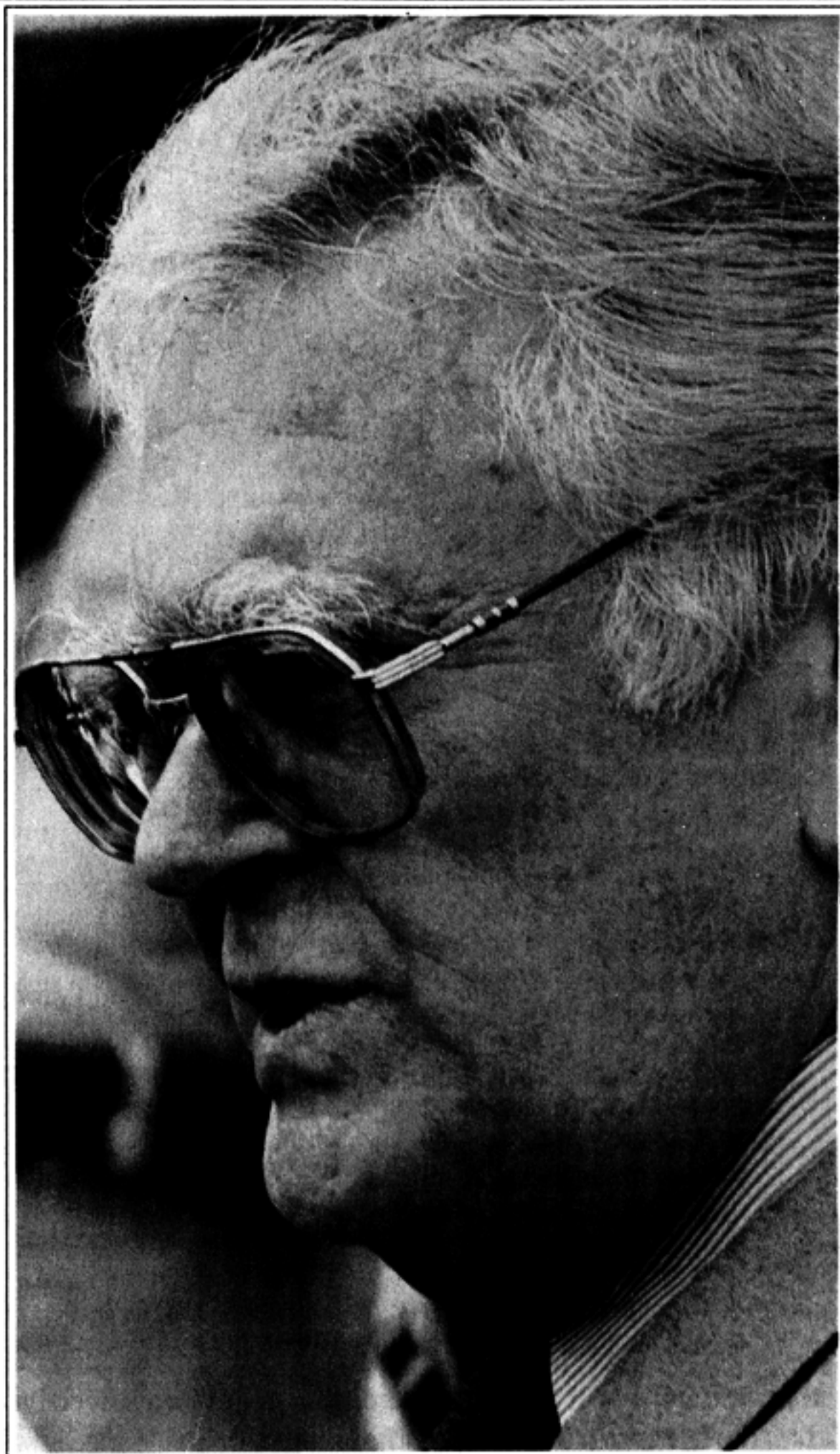
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of Marxism-Leninism. It was assumed that there could be no weaknesses or contradictions in these writers. Authors in party journals would simply quote them uncritically to support their views. The traditions of Western Marxism - both revolutionary (Gramsci, Luxemburg) and academic (Althusser, Poulantzas, Anderson, etc) - were by and large ignored. Should both the classical authors and Western Marxism be reassessed?

Slovo: Clearly, yes. I think the key problem of the doctrinaire Marxism of the past is that it became a sort of catechism, and was regarded as unquestionable. It became a static concept which didn't need any further development, even in the light of changing conditions.

There can be no absolute truth, and to regard Marxism as a finished revelation of all truth is in fact contrary to one of the basic positions of Marxism. One of its key philosophical concepts is that there can't be in any historical sense an absolute truth. For example, classical Marxism as we've just noted was clearly wrong in its projection that capitalist relations of production could no longer ensure increasing productivity.

So one welcomes the new spirit of Marxism represented in the perestroika and glasnost movement. It opens up the possibility, not just of examining current developments using the tool of Marxist analysis, but even examining some of the entrenched conceptions, which we



"Speaking personally, what a relief it is to live in the age and spirit of glasnost, in which every word uttered by a General Secretary is not expected to be infallible! The expectation of infallibility is a burden that can only produce stagnation."

Photo: /Afrapix

always in the past regarded as absolute truth. Even those have got to be examined in the light of how history has unfolded. Obviously we cannot proceed on the basis that those propositions are unquestion-

able, and therefore the opening up of Marxism, the exchange of ideas between Marxists of the kind you have mentioned, and the Marxist movement as a whole, is a fundamental necessity. ☆

SACTU: *end of an era*

RENÉE ROUX looks at the issues surrounding the decision to phase out the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) has operated in exile and underground for the past 25 years. Although it was never banned, the repression of the early 1960's smashed SACTU as a legal mass organisation. The unbanning of the ANC and the SACP earlier this year posed important questions about the future of SACTU, and the relation of COSATU to a legalised ANC and SACP.

On the one extreme, Dali Mporu, a Release Mandela Committee (RMC) spokesperson said that COSATU should disband, so that SACTU could take its rightful place inside the country in alliance with the ANC. He suggested that "workerists" in COSATU would resist this because they fear a close alliance with a national democratic movement, and would rather form alliances with an independent workers' party.

On the other extreme, some observers warned that COSATU would bow to pressure to become a labour wing of the ANC. The fear is that CO-

SATU's main task will be to mobilise workers' political support for the ANC's short-term political interests, i.e. to get into power. Sociologist Duncan Innes suggested that COSATU is likely to further neglect shop-floor issues and put more effort into building the ANC.

From different angles these approaches reached the same conclusions: that COSATU would not be able to safeguard its independence and that the federation would be divided on the future of SACTU. Prior to the SACTU NEC meeting at the beginning of March, it also became evident that people within its own ranks had different views on whether to re-surface as SACTU, whether to merge with COSATU, or whether to disband or phase out in favour of COSATU.

Joint Nec meeting

The central questions facing SACTU after the unbannings were:

- Since it was driven underground in the early 1960's, SACTU ceased to exist as a

formal trade union structure, but rather as a grouping of activists within trade unions and within the ANC, Umkhonto We Sizwe and the SACP. If it re-emerged inside the country as a formal structure, what would its constituency be, and what would this mean for ongoing attempts to unite the trade union movement into one federation of industrial unions?

- In exile, SACTU continued to be part of the Congress Alliance and to represent the needs of organised workers within the alliance. With the ANC and SACP operating as legal organisations inside the country, could SACTU adequately play this role? COSATU, as a mass organisation would be better placed to represent organised workers.

While some COSATU affiliates discussed the future of SACTU in detail, the federation did not aim to reach a hard and fast position before meeting SACTU to hear their views. The consensus however was that



Foundation Conference of SACTU, 5 March 1955

Photo: Eli Weinberg (Portrait of a people)

SACTU should be phased out, and affiliates differed mainly over the timing.

FAWU, for example felt that it was premature to talk of disbanding SACTU because political conditions have not changed irreversibly. More discussion was needed, they felt, before underground structures could dissolve.

The NEC's of COSATU and SACTU met on 19 March to discuss the future status of SACTU and the trade union movement in South Africa.

The meeting took far-reaching decisions. The key decisions were:

1. SACTU will not re-emerge in the country
2. SACTU will be phased out. This process is being overseen by a Facilitating Committee of 5 representatives each from SACTU and COSATU. The NEC of SACTU will remain in existence until the process is completed.

3. As far as possible exiled SACTU cadres will be integrated into COSATU and affiliates.

The decisions were in line with a resolution of the SACTU NEC of 8-12 March. NUMSA general secretary Moses Mayekiso comments that, "it would be wrong to think, that because SACTU did not have formal structures with formal worker membership as in a conventional union or federation, the decision was not significant.

After 2 February it became possible for thousands of exiles to return and it became possible for SACTU to re-emerge in the country. If SACTU had decided to re-emerge as a force outside COSATU, it would have attracted some unions and some workers. SACTU respects what COSATU stands for and what it has achieved, and is moving according to the principle of one country one federation, under the banner of COSATU."

SACTU, the ANC and the union movement

SACTU's role in the 1970's and 1980's

SACTU cadres have continued to play an important role since the organisation was driven underground. From the early 1970's SACTU encouraged the revival and development of progressive trade unions inside the country. Important work was done in building international solidarity. Through these contacts, and especially its relationship with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), SACTU was able to channel skills and resources for education, campaigns and strike-relief.

SACTU leadership have also been able to give political guidance at certain critical times, such as when the unity talks were threatened by mistrust between the unions

affiliated to the UDF and the FOSATU unions. At that stage SACTU encouraged the UDF unions, most of which were general unions, to merge into existing industrial unions. They also stressed that ideology should not stand in the way of working class unity.

As a member of the Congress Alliance, SACTU has always encouraged unions to actively involve their members and structures in the struggle for national liberation. Internationally, SACTU has defended COSATU's decision to develop a close relationship with the UDF, ANC and SACP in the face of hostility from international bodies like the ICFTU.

Tensions and problems

The decisions taken by COSATU and SACTU show considerable maturity. However the relationship between mass trade union structures and underground structures has by no means been a bed of roses, and there have been problems on both sides. Many people argue that SACTU played a destructive role in the early days of FOSATU and SAAWU, when there was considerable competition for the control of the trade union movement and its political leadership and direction.

Differing political strategies and different forms of organisation were a source of tension. The unions became highly politicised because the political organisations of the liberation movement were banned. While the unions had to play a highly active political

role, the absence of legal structure meant that policy, strategy and tactics could not be openly debated. Within COSATU this meant that debate has been exceptionally heated.

There were many instances of tension developing over the right of 'outside' organisations or underground structures to prescribe action to trade unions without democratic consultation with their structures. Hence unionists were irritated when SACTU pamphlets appeared calling on unions not to register, or calling for a stayaway (eg on Republic Day, 1981).

Any organisation with underground structures of accountability and a leadership in exile will have problems with communication and discipline. SACTU suffered as a result. Cadres often showed little respect for democratically constituted legal structures, and it sometimes appeared that the exiled leadership was forming positions or policy with inadequate information about what was happening on the ground.

On the other hand, some union officials in FOSATU and other 'independent' unions over-reacted to any non-union influence on workers, over whom they acted as 'guardians'. They were suspicious of all organisations that were not explicitly socialist and completely visible, with clearly defined democratic practices. SACTU would be treated with suspicion because it was underground, not based at the shop-floor, and allied to the ANC. Officials and workers in

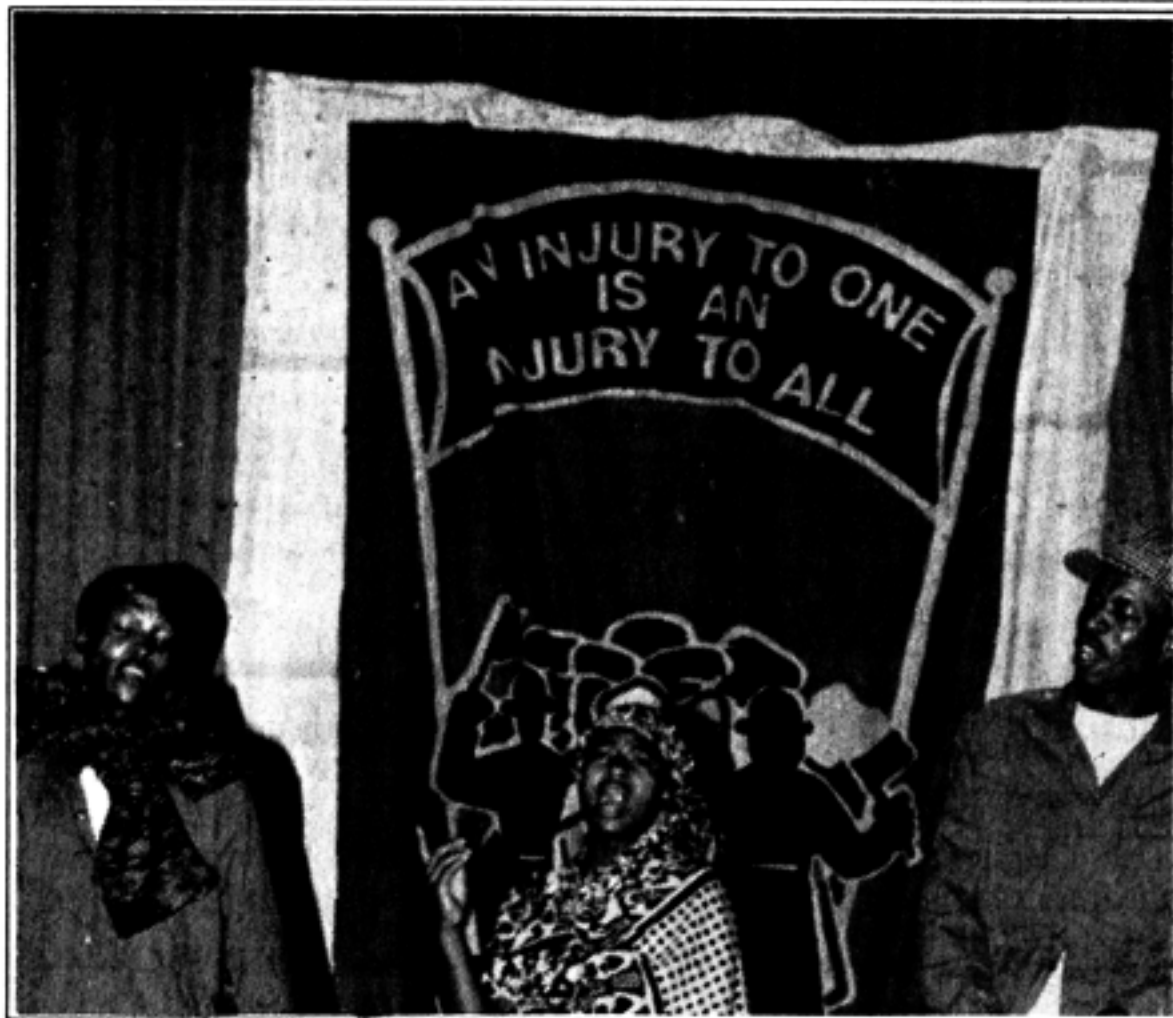
trade unions such as SAAWU responded with hostility to the views, regarding them as an attack on the ANC.

There have been some tough battles for the independence of the trade union movement. In the 1950's and up till quite recently the dominant approach in the SACP and the ANC was that trade unions are conveyor belts for party political position and that a trade union is only as important as its alliance with a party. Today there is recognition of some of the principles that trade union leadership inside the country has asserted: that democratic trade union structures can and must play an independent leadership role in the struggle for democracy. The trade unions themselves have influenced thinking in the SACP. Joe Slovo acknowledges this in his paper *Has Socialism Failed?* (see *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14.6)

Closer to home, the democratic spirit which dominated in the re-emerged trade union movement from the early 70's onwards, also made an impact on our thinking".

The present relationship between COSATU, SACTU, the ANC and SACP is the product of years of debate within COSATU and between COSATU and political organisations. There has been movement on all sides. This relationship has also been influenced by the alliance with the UDF that has been forged in practice over the past few years.

However, Dali Mpfu's view, quoted above, shows that there is still a misconception amongst some activists. The view is that COSATU has



Cultural event as part of a 1985 trade union celebration of SACTU's 30th anniversary

Photo: Vuyi Mbalu/Afrapix

not developed a political tradition and leadership of its own which is in tune with, and influences, the rest of the liberation forces. This approach sees democratic structures as passive conduits believing that if COSATU has made progressive political decisions, which has now earned it a place in the revolutionary alliance, it is primarily because of the vanguard role of underground political structures, whether of SACTU, the ANC and the SACP.

Trade Union independence

Conditions in the 1950's and strategic perspectives at the time led to a situation where an extremely close alliance was formed between SACTU, the ANC and SACP. After the SACP and ANC were banned, in 1950 and 1961 respectively, many SACTU leaders had to

take on even greater responsibility. Many had overlapping leadership positions in SACTU, the SACP, the ANC, and Umkhonto We Sizwe after its formation in 1961. In retrospect, many analysts and activists have argued that SACTU leadership focused too much energy on their political tasks, and were unable to build a trade union movement which would survive repression. Although SACTU was never formally banned, the progressive trade union movement virtually collapsed when its leaders were banned, jailed or exiled. This was one of the major reasons given by FOSATU leaders for keeping their distance from political organisation.

In recent meetings between COSATU, and the ANC\SACP\SACTU, there has been full agreement that the trade union movement

must develop its own leadership and its independent organisational base. They also agree that trade unions should never become a conveyor belt for positions or decisions of the party as happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. According to COSATU there is full agreement on the following principles:

1. The trade union movement must remain independent and under the democratic control of its members.

2. COSATU must play a key role in restructuring the post-apartheid economy, and not rely entirely on politicians and 'experts'.

3. COSATU must form disciplined alliances with political parties who share common programmes, objectives and campaigns.

4. To ensure that COSATU remains independent and that the trade union movement is strengthened and given adequate attention, trade union leadership should be further developed.

5. While COSATU members are encouraged to join and occupy leadership positions in political parties, there should be a clear separation of leadership between the trade union movement and political parties. In other words, as far as possible, key trade union figures should not occupy key political positions, and leadership should not wear multiple hats.

While this common basis has been laid, COSATU will still from time to time have to fight for its independence. Tensions will continue to exist, between the need for streng-

thening the organisation's independent base on the one hand, and the needs of the national liberation struggle on the other. These needs will have to be balanced for a long time yet.

Tasks

According to COSATU general secretary, Jay Naidoo: "Our common understanding is that it is not a name or the leaders of a federation that matters as much as whether it is able to organise and express the interests of the working class in this current phase of struggle."

COSATU has gone a long way towards achieving the principles and objectives of both organisations:

- to organise and unify all workers into non-racial unions
- to build one national trade union federation
- to build strong industrial unions which can fight for workers' economic rights
- to engage fully in the struggle against racial oppression and economic exploitation
- to build international worker solidarity.

On the other hand a number of serious weaknesses remain: the large majority of workers are still unorganised, the trade union movement remains fragmented and white workers remain in reactionary unions. The most immediate tasks are to strengthen and unify the existing trade union movement and organise the unorganised.

Jay Naidoo spelt out the challenges: "The progressive trade union movement cannot

expect a future post-apartheid state and ANC government to deliver workers' needs on a plate.

"The trade union movement will need to play a key role in the future restructuring of the economy and in formulating policies on re-distribution, investment, education, housing, health, manpower development and the environment. The impact that a progressive union movement can have on future state and economic planning will depend directly on a number of factors, including its representivity, its strength on the ground and the unity within its ranks".

Phasing SACTU out and integrating SACTU cadres

By phasing out SACTU and integrating exiled cadres into its structures, COSATU and its affiliates hope to rapidly address existing gaps and weaknesses, for example the lack of trained education and administrative staff. COSATU also hopes to augment staff in weaker sectors such as the farm-, domestic-, and public sectors, as well as in the bantustans.

The Facilitating Committee has the mandate to oversee a number of processes:

1. The phasing out of SACTU
2. The return of SACTU cadres in exile
3. The integration of SACTU members into COSATU and affiliates
4. A visit by the SACTU NEC to report to workers on their activities since going underground as well as the decision to phase out
5. Reports to international

trade union and fraternal organisations on the decision to phase out SACTU

6. Periodic reports to COSATU and SACTU, as well as to the ANC, SACP and the UDF, until the process has been completed

7. The transfer of assets and diversion of international support to COSATU, and discussion of the implications of SACTU offices for COSATU's international work.

The process of integrating SACTU members will be dealt with according to union constitutions and practices developed over the years. SACTU will list all personnel, their skills and areas of origin, while COSATU and affiliates will inform SACTU about needs and vacancies. Each union will have different needs and slightly different criteria, but the general principle seems to be that SACTU cadres will not be "parachuted" into positions, but will be considered along with other applicants for vacancies.

One country one federation

COSATU and SACTU have reached consensus without any major problems, primarily because of their commitment to common principles.

They hope that by example, the decision to phase out SACTU will strengthen the drive toward uniting the trade union movement under one powerful federation. When the SACTU NEC visit the country in May they plan to meet with unions outside COSATU to explain the decision to phase out and urge greater unity. ☆

Organising farmworkers

Farming is the least-organised sector of the South African economy. ANDREW BALL puts forward an analysis of the farming sector, and suggests a strategic approach.*



Canecutter in Natal

Photo: Cedric Nunn/Afrapix

"Ek is nie 'n bandiet nie!"

These are the words of a man who had been dismissed from the Anglo American Farms estate Vergelegen, for asking why he had not been paid for a public holiday. For nine years he worked on this farm, first for wealthy local farmers who sold the farm, and then for Anglo American subsidiary Amfarms, which bought it from them.

This man had lived on the farm, and had worked the same daily hours, month after month, throughout the year, as all the permanent workers. But for nine years he was employed as a casual labourer! He was dismissed at the whim of a supervisor, without notice pay, pension payouts or even the right to appeal his case.

When over one hundred Vergelegen workers met in October 1989 in a general meeting organised by the shopstewards committee on the farm, this unfair dismissal and the position of 'casuals'

were discussed. Where management had tried to divide the workers before - African from coloured workers, men from women, casual from permanent, workers with houses from workers in the hostels - now the workers sat together and discussed each others' grievances.

Again and again workers used the words "Ja, ons is nie *bandiete*** nie!" Even on an Anglo farm the workers know that they are treated with as little dignity as prisoners. They are subject to the whims of white management, who spend tens of thousands on upgrading a library and buying new bakkies for management to ride around in, before they will improve the cramped damp houses and hostels of the workers or the muddy roads that lead to them.

Comparing their treatment to that of *bandiete* is ironic. On many farms, workers are actually replaced by paroled prisoners. The prisoners earn

* Andrew Ball is a researcher with the Farmworkers Research and Resource Project.

** Bandiet is a slang term for prisoner

R1,05 a day, which is paid to them when they finish their parole. They are 'free' only for as long as they have a job. If they leave the farm without the farmer's permission to try and get another job they are immediately regarded as escapees and are liable to be arrested. Hiring prison labour is just one of the cynical ways in which the state and the farmers undermine the workers' ability to resist.

Farmers again and again act as if they are above the law - assaulting workers and unlawfully evicting them from their houses. Again and again farmers prosecuted for murder or culpable homicide are found guilty on a lesser charge of assault and are given a fine.

The only way to challenge oppression on the farms is for farmworkers to be organised into unions. Any attempt to do this needs to be based on a relatively clear understanding not only of the many layers of oppression that confront farmworkers in their daily lives, but also an understanding of the farming sector as an economic and political entity, with its own set of state institutions and farmer organisations.

Organising the farmworkers will be extremely difficult. Success is only likely if unions develop clear strategies based on a sound analysis of the different sectors, crops and markets, and an analysis of the agribusinesses that are increasingly dominating many sectors. So far,

however, the unions attempting to organise the farms do not appear to have developed a clear strategy.

Farming in the SA economy

White-owned farms play a vital role in the SA economy. They provide almost all the food in the country. If progressive forces are to determine the agenda of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, they must have the organised ability to contest control over the production and distribution of food.

Without an organisational base on the farms, any post-apartheid government will be confronted with the strength of the white farmers. They could cause severe disruption of food production if they felt that their interests and profits were being threatened.

White farming provides employment for over 1,4 million workers. This group of workers could play a dynamic role, now and in the future, in taking forward the struggle of the oppressed. Their particular experiences of oppression should be integrated into the struggle against apartheid.

The farmers prepare

While the trade union movement has failed to tackle seriously the issue of organising the farms, the farmers have started to prepare. The popular farming journals regularly run columns on labour issues facing farmers and how they should improve conditions to

head off any 'trouble' from unions. Some farmers suspect union activity. In a recent survey of maize farmers, 21% of the interviewed farmers suspected that there had been union contact with the workers on their farms. These farmers were being encouraged to introduce works councils, written contracts, written grievance procedures and written disciplinary procedures on their farms.*

The state, the South African Agricultural Union, and the Rural Foundation are developing a broader strategy to head off effective worker organisation in agriculture. Working closely with the government's Population Development Programme and the SADF in some areas, the Rural Foundation has attempted to persuade farmers that better housing and improved productivity are better routes to labour control and profit. Farmers are being encouraged to improve worker housing and to improve the basic training of their workers through sending them to state-run training institutions.

The Rural Foundation attempts to create a non-threatening (to the farmer) 'partnership' between worker and farmer through workers committees and 'consultation'. This is based on the traditional paternalism of 'baas to volk' on the farms. Behind it all looms the fear of sanctions and the guerilla incursions of the liberation movement.

By contrast to these prep-

* *Gildenhuys, A & van der Walt S 'Arbeids praktyke in die Somerreevalsaaigebied' HSRC 1989.*



1987 - dismissed Sapekoe tea estates workers load their possessions onto a truck. Often a farmworkers strike will result in instant dismissal - organisers should seek other tactics to pressurise employers.

Photo: Cedric Nunn/Afrapix

arations on the part of the farmers, the union presence in the agricultural sector remains minimal. National strategies for developing an organisational presence on any significant scale appear to be almost lacking.

■ Agribusiness

White-owned farming can be divided into agribusiness and settler family farms. There is some overlap between these categories. Some settler family farmers produce on a scale comparable to agribusiness, while some companies with farms, farm on a small scale. However, agribusiness and family farms offer very different strategic opportunities for organising workers.

Broadly speaking, an agri-

business:

- is part of a group of companies (which might be listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange), and/or
- is able to integrate its *farming* with *processing* so that it can gain a major market share, or target particular markets, and/or
- it is a research company which investigates new crops or tests fertilisers, pesticides, etc.

Agribusiness can be divided into different categories which offer different strategic opportunities.

Multinational companies

Many foreign-owned companies have invested in South African agriculture specifically to exploit apartheid conditions and extract a high

rate of profit from particular crops/products. Lonhro, Afex Corporation, Shell, Donald Cook and Crookes Bros and others, all have investments world-wide from a British or European base.

Some of these companies are exposed to sanctions pressure, which may strengthen the hand of union organisation. There is scope for international solidarity to support organising workers in these companies. On the other hand, some multinationals may respond to worker organisation by disinvesting and moving their operations elsewhere.

South African companies

Many South African companies are based in agriculture, or have a big agricultural component. These include

Rainbow Chicken, Kanhym, Tongaat Hulets, Tiger Oats, Miellie-kip, Bester Investments, HLH/Huntcor etc, along with forestry companies like Sappi, Lion Match etc.

These companies play key roles in the agricultural sectors where they are based. They are highly profitable, and generally attempt to control and dominate the sub-sector they invest in. Rembrandt, working through HLH, serves as an example of this monopoly strategy. Not only does HLH have 130 000 ha. of forests, but through its subsidiaries Senteeko, and Transvaal Sugar Corporation it also controls large tea, sugar, citrus and processing holdings. HLH also has a research division that develops new products for the forestry division. HLH sub-contracts farmers to supply wood. Thus HLH can supply its sawmills without having to buy expensive land.

The structure of a company like HLH suggests an organising strategy that would target *all* its linked operations. HLH should be targeted in the forests and sawmills, as well as on the tea, sugar and citrus estates. The power of organised workers at HLH could then be used to support the struggles of workers on those family farms that are contracted to HLH. These struggles can in turn be linked to those of workers on Rainbow Chicken, which is 25% owned by HLH. Rainbow, the largest chicken producer in the country, also has contracts with many farmers to supply maize to it. The workers on these family farms

could in turn be supported by action by organised Rainbow chicken workers.

Farm products are processed by industrial companies and are sold to supermarkets etc. Many private farms are now contracted to supply a single monopoly company, whether a forestry company like HLH or a vegetable processor like Table Top, or a supermarket chain like Woolworths. It is here that organised workers can challenge the monopolies for directly or indirectly exploiting the poverty of farmworkers.

Chemical and pharmaceutical companies

These companies often acquire farms for the purpose of testing their manufactured products or acquiring raw materials. Companies such as Hoechst, Bayer, MSD (foreign owned) and Pharmancura etc., do not have a major interest in agriculture per se. The holding of agricultural land is secondary to their main business.

These chemical companies are involved in the production of pesticides and herbicides which are used with pitifully few safety precautions on most farms. They bear responsibility for the injuries and deaths on the farms as much as do the farmers who seldom inform the farmworkers about the dangers, and the state which never enforces its own legislation on the farms.

These companies could be a prime target, both for actual organisation and solidarity work. Poisons affect the farm-

workers and can also affect those who eat the products.

Many of these companies are owned by German, Swiss, US or other foreign parent companies. International pressure and solidarity could probably strengthen efforts to organise their farmworkers.

State-owned farms

The state's landholding is a relatively small percentage of the total landholdings of farmers. But it is still a major farmer with more farms than most agribusiness companies. There are two kinds of state-owned farms - research farms and parastatal farms.

Research farms

There are least 30 research farms around the country at universities and agricultural colleges, or controlled directly under the Department of Agriculture.

Research farms may be vulnerable from a strategic point of view, as the government and some sectors of the SA Agricultural Union are behind the 'liberal' intervention of the Rural Foundation. It is unlikely that the state would want to use heavy-handed tactics against workers at colleges and universities, while it is trying to teach students to be good managers of labour, along Rural Foundation lines.

At Elsenburg, an agricultural college in Stellenbosch, an elderly widow was threatened with eviction in 1988. Workers marched to the manager's office, demanding that she be allowed to stay in her house on the farm. The farm manage-

■ Zebediela - strike on a parastatal farm

Last year's strike at Zebediela Citrus Farms shows some of the complex issues on parastatal farms. These citrus estates in the Northern Transvaal are run by the South African Development Trust. Workers decided to go on strike after management refused to respond to the National Union of Farmworkers. Instead they called the police and refused to negotiate. After about a month, however, management agreed to increase wages and not to evict the workers. Zebediela refused to recognise the union, and negotiated through lawyers.

Zebediela management was probably concerned that publicity about the strike could adversely affect citrus exports. This is especially important, given the formation of the new European market in 1992. Two other events occurred at the time of the strike also help us to understand the settlement. The Citrus Exchange donated R500 000 to the Rural Foundation for its projects. And a Department of Manpower delegation met with the International Federation of Plantation Agricultural and Allied Workers Unions in Geneva. They discussed the possibility of legislation to cover farmworkers on SA.

***Kragdadigheid* will undermine reform**

These events help us to understand the pressure on Zebediela's management. It is unlikely the state would want one of its farms undermining the broader 'reform and keep our markets' strategy by being *kragdadig* with workers.

Most Zebediela workers are seasonal pickers. This will make it difficult for the union to maintain its base between picking seasons. Reports after the strike indicated that management had already begun to act against workers who were not following the method of work absolutely. On the other hand an estate such as Zebediela has numerous tasks (driving, packing, etc.) that might offer potential power bases for the union among the permanent workers.

At times it looked as if the Zebediela strike would repeat the disastrous Sapekoe Tea Estate strike, where there was a mass dismissal of seasonal workers.

The lesson of Sapekoe was that organisers should be cautious about launching strikes on farms which employ many seasonal pickers. Unions should exploit other tactics to pressurise management without provoking direct confrontation. The Zebediela case suggests organisers should also gain information about markets and potential solidarity action, including secondary strikes. ☆

ment, under the Department of Agriculture, rapidly settled the dispute. Management agreed the widow could stay, and claimed there had been a misunderstanding about her eviction.

In this case management was prepared to deal with the specific demand of workers. The state seems, however, to be reluctant to *recognise* unions on farms. For example,

a recognition agreement between Transport & General Workers Union and Stellenbosch University specifically left out the workers at the university farms. This was because of pressure from the surrounding farmers.

A lesson for union organisers is that sometimes progress can be made by taking up specific issues, rather than demanding union recognition

as a major goal. This can be more successful, especially when local farmers fear that recognition on a state farm would increase the pressure on them to negotiate with workers.

Parastatals

These are farms controlled by parastatal development agencies, ie. the Industrial Development Corporation

(IDC) or the SA Development Trust and the development trusts in the bantustans.

On parastatals the reaction to unions has also been mixed. At Rand Water Board (RWB) farms, organisation of farmworkers initially resulted in arbitrary dismissals, and eviction orders. The Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU - now Municipal, State, Farm and Allied Workers Union - MSFAWU) continued to organise at all the other RWB plants and farms, despite the RWB being a 'key point'. A recent strike has seen the RWB now agree to a recognition agreement in its water purification plants. The agreement and the position of the farmworkers is still the subject of negotiation.

A similar strategy was applied by the OVGWU at a farm owned by the Vereeniging Municipality. The municipality workers were organised by OVGWU, and the union has succeeded in pressurising management to include the farmworkers in negotiations.

Strategies for organising agribusiness

The above analysis shows that farming, like the food industry, consists of many sub-sectors. The conditions are very different in each sector. Strategies for organising

farmworkers should be based on a careful analysis of sectors, ownership, crops, labour process and market.*

About 10% of the agricultural land in SA is owned by company farmers, and a further 0,3% by the state. These figures suggest that the role of agribusiness in agriculture is still relatively limited. However, the share of land owned by agribusiness does not reflect its share of production.

For example, a sheep farm uses far more land than a chicken farm - yet the chicken industry will, by the early 1990's, be the largest agricultural sector in terms of value produced.**

In other words, agribusiness control a much bigger proportion of agricultural production than their landholdings suggest. Thus it would be strategically important to focus organising on them. The network of agribusinesses, if organised, could be used as a base for organising the family farms in difficult regions or sectors.

Another useful strategy could be to focus on organising specific companies. For example, Amfarms has the longest history of organisation, with farms in most regions except the Eastern Cape***.

Two unions, the MSFA-

WU and FAWU, now have a presence on these farms and the potential for sharing information and taking on management nationally appears to offer interesting bargaining possibilities. Amfarms offers the potential, like state farms, for national bargaining units on a company basis in a range of sub-sectors. The experiences and footholds gained here could prove valuable in the struggles that are going to accompany the process of transformation.

A strategy of focusing organisation on agribusiness, however, should not lead us too far away from the problem of the family farm sector.

■ Settler family farms

Most farming land is owned by family farmers. Family farms are essentially small owner-occupied businesses, often farmed by father and sons or by closely related partners.

Since the 1930's family farmers have been favoured by government policies which protected them from the worst ravages of nature, interest rates, cheaper imported products and low prices from over-production. Farmers were assured of good prices and cheap credit. This protection occurred, in part, because

* Stavrou, SE: 'The Development of capitalism in South African agriculture: the restructuring of agrarian capitalism after 1950'. Paper presented to Workshop on the SA Agrarian Question: Past, Present and Future, Wits 1987

** See "Die Pluimveebedryf" paper presented on behalf of the Poultry Producers Association at Agricon '89

*** Amfarms, despite refusing to formally recognise a long-standing OVGWU presence on their farms and a more recent FAWU-FWP presence in the Western Cape, has recognised UWUSA on two of their farms. At one of these farms, workers interviewed had no knowledge of UWUSA despite management claiming that it had recognition. This would appear to follow tactics applied in the sugar farms of Natal reported by a FAWU-FWP organiser.

of the political importance of farmers as voters.

Since the late 1970's the National Party has turned increasingly to urban middle-class voters for support, and has favoured the needs of urban capital rather than farmers. The family farmer has, since the mid-1980's, been exposed to high interest rates, rising costs and lower prices for their produce.

Co-operatives

Historically, co-operatives have played a significant role as business institutions protecting the interests of their farmer members through the strength of combined buying and selling. All members had an equal vote in the affairs of the co-operative. This prevented the richer farmers from dominating the co-operative.

The wealthy farmers could buy more shares in the co-operative than the poor member, but they could not increase their votes in that way. The co-operatives became the major economic institutions dominating the rural areas and the farmers' lives.

Most agricultural products are still marketed through the co-operatives. Their role however is changing. The bigger co-operatives are now farming on their own behalf, for example Bokomo with Bonnybird. They are now marketing their own produce, and are not simply functioning on behalf of the farmers.

The co-operatives have come to exercise a lot of control over the farmers. This

stems from their control over the supply of various forms of credit and their role as control board agents through whom crops must be marketed.

Some co-operatives are entering alliances with the major food companies. This gives them access to capital for expansion and allows the food company to withdraw from actual farming. Examples are the deals between Tiger and Langeberg and Premier and Bokomo/Sacca.

By bringing farmers together, the co-operatives used to protect the farmers from domination by urban capital. Now, however, the co-operatives are increasingly dominating the small farmers, often jointly with urban capital.

As an example of this domination, Langeberg's canning operations are paying better prices for tomato's that suit their canning needs and punishing farmers who do not meet these needs. These demands leave the farmer with the choice of supply as told, no matter what the production conditions are like, or accept a lower price.

The changes in the co-operatives are part of an increasing trend towards agribusiness and monopolies. Smaller farmers are driven from the land by bankruptcy. For example, in the dairy industry the number of licensed milk farmers declined by 50% over the period 1981 to 1987. At the same time, dairy co-operatives have been rapidly expanding and merging.

Different sectors, different responses

The changes facing the farming sector - deregulation, increasing competitiveness, less protection, disbanding of control boards, the changing role of co-operatives - are all consistent with the government's drive for privatisation and a 'free market' economy.

Those family farmers in sectors where they can compete in the market (wool and deciduous fruit for example), do not oppose the deregulation and 'market forces' policies adopted by the government. Larger farmers in some sectors would probably view a deregulated market as an opening for expansion without the burden of supporting uncompetitive smaller farmers. Other sectors such as maize, other grain crops, tobacco and the oilseed crops would view the withdrawal of government regulation with far more unease. They would find it more difficult to survive without protection.

Thus different farmers and sectors are responding to these economic shifts in white agriculture in different ways.

The Rural Foundation provides an interesting pointer to long term state policy and the direction of the SA Agricultural Union (SAAU). The wine, deciduous and citrus fruit sectors are putting their economic weight behind the Rural Foundation initiative. This is surely an indicator of their need to maintain export markets against sanctions.

It also puts these sectors into conflict with sectors like

the maize sector, where poverty wages and shocking housing conditions are the order of the day. Maize farmers, like the wealthy former Minister of Agriculture Hendrick Schoeman, often pay migrant workers as little R2,70 per day.

In areas like Schweizer-Reinecke the wages for permanent workers can be as low as R30 per month. This contrasts with the R500 per month offered by some of the liberal farmers who are signatories of the Winelands Commitment.*

Because of their weakening economic situation, most family farmers are unlikely to support initiatives like the Rural Foundation. They will probably be unwilling to buy into the 'happy dream' of the contented and well-housed workers being advocated by the Rural Foundation.

Challenging the violence on the farms

As a starting point the violence by farmers against farm workers must be stopped. Control by violence appears to be almost entrenched in certain areas as the standard form of labour discipline. A recent guide on labour relations on farms, by a private consultancy service, finds it necessary to devote a section to this practice, describing assault as 'the most common (court) action brought against the farmers'.

Sometimes workers flee the

farm and seek help from advice offices, churches or progressive organisations in nearby towns. It is extremely important for organisations to take these cases seriously, and use every means to challenge the violence.

- They should try to ensure that the case goes to court. The police, prosecutors and magistrates in small rural towns are likely to be sympathetic to the farmers, so pressure will have to be brought to bear. If the farmer is found criminally guilty, he/she should then be sued for damages.
- Media campaigns should be waged to expose the harsh conditions and violence experienced by farmworkers.
- Pressure should be placed on the co-operatives, companies and supermarkets which buy farmers' products to take a stand against the violence and refuse to trade with violent farmers.
- Farmworkers are very isolated, so every successful action should be publicised, no matter how small it is. Progressive organisations should make sure news of the success reaches workers still on the farm, and workers on surrounding farms.
- Farms are covered by the Machinery and Occupational Safety Act and the Workmens Compensation

Act. Pressure and publicity can focus on the failure of farmers to comply with these acts, as well as the Hazardous Substances Act, which covers the use of poisen.

It is only when the violent grip of the farmers has been challenged and loosened, that farmworkers will feel free to organise on family farms.

Advice offices

Advice offices may be better suited for this kind of work than trade unions. This would free the trade union organisers to concentrate on the strategic task of organising agribusiness. Advice offices form an existing network whose skills and contacts with unions should be developed. In the short and medium term workers on smaller farms will probably be best serviced by advice offices which can meet their individual needs.

Unionising the family farms

Organising the workers on most of the family farms will be extremely difficult under existing conditions. There are, however, some opportunities that can be exploited in the short term.

Farms that may be covered by industrial legislation

Some farms and co-operatives may not be defined as farms, but as industrial enterprises

* These figures are extracted from FRRP work in progress on the migrancy patterns of farm workers and also from our contact with Advice Offices in the Western Transvaal and Western Cape. The Winelands Commitment is a document signed by four liberal wine farmers guaranteeing a salary of R500 pm, 60% of which must be in cash.

under the LRA. This would mean that workers in these workplaces are covered by the LRA as well as by minimum wages set for the specific industry. This would make it much easier for unions to organise these workers (see box on right).

Organising the co-operatives

A useful starting point might be to organise the big co-operatives, where they are involved in farming or processing. These could then serve as an organised base for tackling the family farms in the same sector.

Unions should also target sectors that are profitable and, preferably, export orientated. Profitable export sectors such as citrus, deciduous, avocado's etc, are probably the least difficult to organise. Also those sectors with a high-profile public image, like wine estates, or those with very close links to supermarkets who have to preserve their public image, seem to be obvious targets. Organised supermarket workers can support workers on farms which supply the supermarkets.

The nature of the productive process on the farm itself is also an important factor. For example dairy farming, which is not confined to a single region, has a very industrial style production process, demanding daily attention. Also it is linked to the processing plant on a regular basis, making links between farmworkers and processing workers, especially drivers, much easier.

■ When is a farm not a farm?

The LRA excludes farms from its scope. This means that farmworkers have no union rights (although they may join unions), nor can they go to the industrial court for protection from unfair labour practices. However, the LRA does not define 'farming' very clearly, and there are grounds for believing a number of agribusinesses, state farms, co-operatives and even some family farms are not legally defined as farms. This would mean they are covered by the LRA, by minimum wage regulations, etc. Such workplaces could be ideal targets for unions to build up an organised base from which to organise other farms.

Some farms which may be covered by the LRA are:

- Farms used for testing by chemical companies. They are not farming for the market, but are testing industrial products.
- State research farms are providing a service to farmers rather than producing for the market - which may mean they are not bone fide farms.
- Co-operatives are organisations of farmers which provide services to their members. It is not itself a farmer. A court judgement has supported this view. Also, many co-operatives are involved in *processing*, and should therefore be covered by the LRA.
- Family farmers involved in processing (dairy, packing, slaughtering), especially if they are processing products from other farms, may fall under the LRA. All of these cases need to be tested in court. ☆

Other sectors which have a strongly industrial rhythm to their production process are the broiler chicken and egg sectors. Both have daily cycles of production and their markets are controlled by relatively few producers.

By contrast grain and sugar producers, with centralised selling structures which are difficult to pressurise, and a high level of price fixing, would appear to be difficult targets. This situation is exacerbated by the use of seasonal labour drawn from the

bantustans and kept under close control by the farmers in compounds or barns.

■ Conclusion

It will be extremely difficult to organise the farms. There will have to be a clear perspective and strategically sound approach. It is an illusion that signing up a majority of farmworkers on a farm will lead to a recognition agreement. There is little point to signing up members unless there is a strategy of how to force the



The message is clear

Photo: Pax Magwasa/Afrapix

farmer to negotiate with the workers. Almost certainly such a strategy should look further than resorting to an early and highly risky strike.

So far most approaches to organising farmworkers seem to have neglected planning and preparation. Few of the unions organising in agriculture appear to have taken seriously the question of being informed about the trends in agriculture. Probably as a result of this they appear to lack any sense of direction. Simply going from farm gate to farm gate will not yield results.

The lack of organisation among farmworkers is a serious weakness in the resistance movement. This weakness will not be overcome until unions and other urban-based organisations commit themselves to organising the farms. Not to do so will weaken the struggle against apartheid, and seriously limit the ability of a post-apartheid government to restructure the economy. ☆

■ Your guide to farm workers and the law: Book 2

A manual written by Rural Legal Services Project, 1989 - Cape Town

Like the earlier *Book 1*, *Farm workers and the law: Book 2*, addresses itself to a wide cross-section of people concerned with the legal rights of farm workers. And, like its predecessor, it contains a wealth of information, unfortunately all too often about how very limited the rights of farm workers are. But such rights as there are - and always to fight the limitations - are clearly and concisely set out.

Book 1 provided information on law in general, courts and court procedure, short sections on the tot system and farm shops, focusing mainly on employment, health and safety. *Book 2* adds six further areas: rights in relation to the police; peculiarly South African issues of citizenship; the vexed question of access to land and housing; the particularly rural concern of rights over animals; claims following injury in a motor accident; and lastly, pensions.

Book 2 follows much the same format as *Book 1*: contents pages and summaries for each chapter; questionnaires as a guide for information needed to pursue claims in the various areas; cross references and glossary of difficult words; a list of resources and addresses. A useful addition is an index which covers *Book 1*, as well as *Book 2*.

Book 2 highlights the harsh world of South African farm workers and their vulnerability to actions by farmers and the state. The topics covered in *Book 1*, connected mainly with work, offered some scope for the development of solidarity and collective action. The topics covered in *Book 2*, in contrast, deal with rights which, in law, almost in definition are individual. A few of the headings in the various chapters may illustrate this: *When can the police search you?*, *What are your rights (as a labour tenant)?*, *How can a farmer force you off land?*, *When can your animals be taken away?*, and so on. This is not to deny, of course, that there is always the possibility that successful court actions on behalf of individuals may set precedents for others.

What *Book 2* surely emphasises is how urgent is the need to restructure entirely the almost feudal system under which most farm workers in South Africa still live. But until this can be done - and perhaps that day is no longer so far off - *Book 2*, like *Book 1*, offers a guide to remedies, which, obscure though they may be, do exist and should be used wherever possible. (Bulletin Correspondent) ☆

Book 1 and Book 2 available at R6 per copy from:
Black Sash, P O Box 2827, Johannesburg 2000 or
Black Sash, 5 Long Street, Mowbray 7700

Racism and the national question

Responding to an article in an earlier *Labour Bulletin*, J.L. argues that banning parties which advocate racism will not help to solve the national question in a democratic South Africa.

Karl von Holdt's support for a multi-party parliamentary democracy for a future SA is to be welcomed (*Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 5). But, in line with the constitutional guidelines published by the ANC for discussion, he does not question the exclusion from this democracy of parties which advocate racism or the incitement of ethnic or regional exclusiveness.

While the motivation behind 'banning' such parties in a future SA democracy is worthy, I would like to question some of the practical implications of such a policy.

Banning racism may lead to a legalistic approach. This would be unfortunate because if we wish to establish a non-racial democratic SA, we will have to do so *in practice*. It will be the practical struggles to overcome racism in schools, workplaces, residential areas, recreation and sport and so on which will be decisive. And we should not fool ourselves that racism will not exist when it is illegal. Many societies which have laws outlawing

racism remain racist, eg. Britain and the United States.

Another point I want to make is that banning racist organisations may not be the best way to end racial politics. Racially or ethnically-based parties like the Conservative Party will still be around when we win democracy. What will be the wisest approach for us to take to such parties?

Zimbabwe - racist politics withers away

Zimbabwe and Namibia may provide insights into this question. After liberation in 1980, the old Rhodesian Front (RF) party of Ian Smith was not banned. It could continue to exist in any form it wished. The RF soon changed its name to the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (CAZ). This won the white ethnic election held in terms of the Lancaster House agreement. But the CAZ has now vanished. Not because it was banned, but because whites came to realise that it was irrelevant to their interests.

The Mugabe government

could easily have banned the Rhodesian Front. But what would have been the result? There would have been no transitional period in which whites could get used to their loss of political power. And still today, instead of understanding the irrelevance of racist politics, many whites might be blaming Mugabe for the loss of their party. If it had been banned, whites might have believed for decades that it was only the law which prevented this party from flourishing in Zimbabwe. Wasn't it preferable for the party to die a natural death?

White politics in Namibia

In Namibia, the prospect of universal franchise elections encouraged much of the white population to cross over from racist and exclusivist parties to the DTA, a multi-racial alliance which won almost a third of the votes in constituent assembly election. The all-white Aksie Christelik Nasionaal, as the SWA NP called itself in the end, was reduced to only one seat in the

assembly, and virtual irrelevance, without ever being banned. Political developments in Namibia led naturally to the end of any significant racist political organisation.

In SA, we will have to deal with the fact of a pro-apartheid Conservative Party with the support of maybe half of all whites. Within that party will be those who argue that they should take part in negotiations to try to guarantee certain white rights. Others will call for militant resistance and bloodshed. If those supporting participation win out and the party competes in the first non-racial election, even if they win half the white vote, this would give them no more than about 8% of the seats in our future parliament.

Irrelevance of racial politics

Any party which limits itself or its appeal to one racial or ethnic group, will inevitably condemn itself to irrelevance. If our aim is to build a non-racial society in practice, would it then be a sensible first move to ban the Conservative Party? Should we not rather consider the Zimbabwean or Namibian approaches to this difficult question?

The question is made even more difficult by problems of definition. Most Conservative Party spokesmen deny their party is racist. They say they stand for the internationally acknowledged right of self-determination of nations. Whether you or I think this is nonsense is irrelevant in constitutional terms. The question

is: who will have the constitutional right to decide who is racist and who is not? The state? The courts? A special constitutional court? Whoever has the right will be in a very powerful situation. Will they be able properly to judge the possible consequences of their decisions?

Nationalities problem in the Soviet Union

I would like to conclude by looking to one other international precedent which I think indicates that the law is sometimes a very dangerous and counter-productive way to deal with problems of racism and ethnic exclusiveness. This is the example of the Soviet Union, which today has more racial and ethnic strife than any other country on earth.

For 70 years the Soviets had laws against racism and what they called 'chauvinist nationalism' (in SA the Conservative Party would be an example of 'chauvinist nationalism'). Until recently the Soviets were able to hide behind these laws and claim they had 'solved' the national question in their country. Now that the USSR is democratising and free speech is encouraged, the truth is coming out, and in a very ugly way.

National and ethnic tensions have been artificially suppressed for so long that generations of pent-up frustration are leading to widespread violence. Behind these tensions lie mass perceptions that the Soviet system did not allow each national, cultural and religious community sufficient autonomy over its

affairs. Nor did the laws allow people to organise themselves as they saw fit.

The nationalities question in the Soviet Union is very different from that in SA. Nevertheless we could learn from the fact that behind a screen of laws, the Soviet government became oblivious to the true feelings of its citizens, and the communist party failed to do the practical work needed to win the allegiance of the people to Soviet nationalism. Now that it is trying to do so it may be too late. From Estonia in the north to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the south, millions of ordinary Soviet citizens have created ethnic organisations for the expression of their grievances.

Law - no cure for racism

Many believe the USSR will not be able to survive as one country for much longer. I am not for one moment suggesting that the laws are exclusively to blame for this situation. The causes are clearly very deep rooted and very complex. But I wonder whether the pretence that the national questions had been solved (which laws encouraged) should not carry at least part of the blame.

Solving the national question properly in SA will be very difficult and will take generations. It involves much, much more than majority rule and restrictive laws. Laws will constitute one (small) part of the struggle against racism, but their role should be very carefully considered in the light of political realities and international experience. ☆

Visiting the forbidden land

MORICE SMITHERS, of the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC), visited the Soviet Union in November 1989. Part of a delegation of political activists invited by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Moscow, he reports on the trip.

While in the Soviet Union, we were told that, although there were a lot of changes taking place in the country, there were some things that would never change. These were the fundamentals on which socialism was built. They included prohibitions on the private ownership of the means of production and on the hiring of labour. That was in November 1989.

Yet on March 7 this year, the Soviet Parliament gave overwhelming approval to legislation allowing Soviet citizens the right to own factories and hire workers for the first time in nearly 70 years.

We stayed in Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, which is a city of nine million people. We also visited Leningrad which, as St Petersburg, used to be the capital of what was then Russia. In neither city did we see any major signs of poverty or homelessness.

However, a trade union official told us that more than 40 million Soviet people live below the official poverty line. This is equal to one-seventh of

the total population of 280 million. Clearly we cannot judge the whole of the USSR by what we saw in Moscow and Leningrad.

The pace of change and the size of the country make it very difficult to write an article 'about the Soviet Union'. What we can do is talk about our impressions and some of the discussions that we had.

Some background

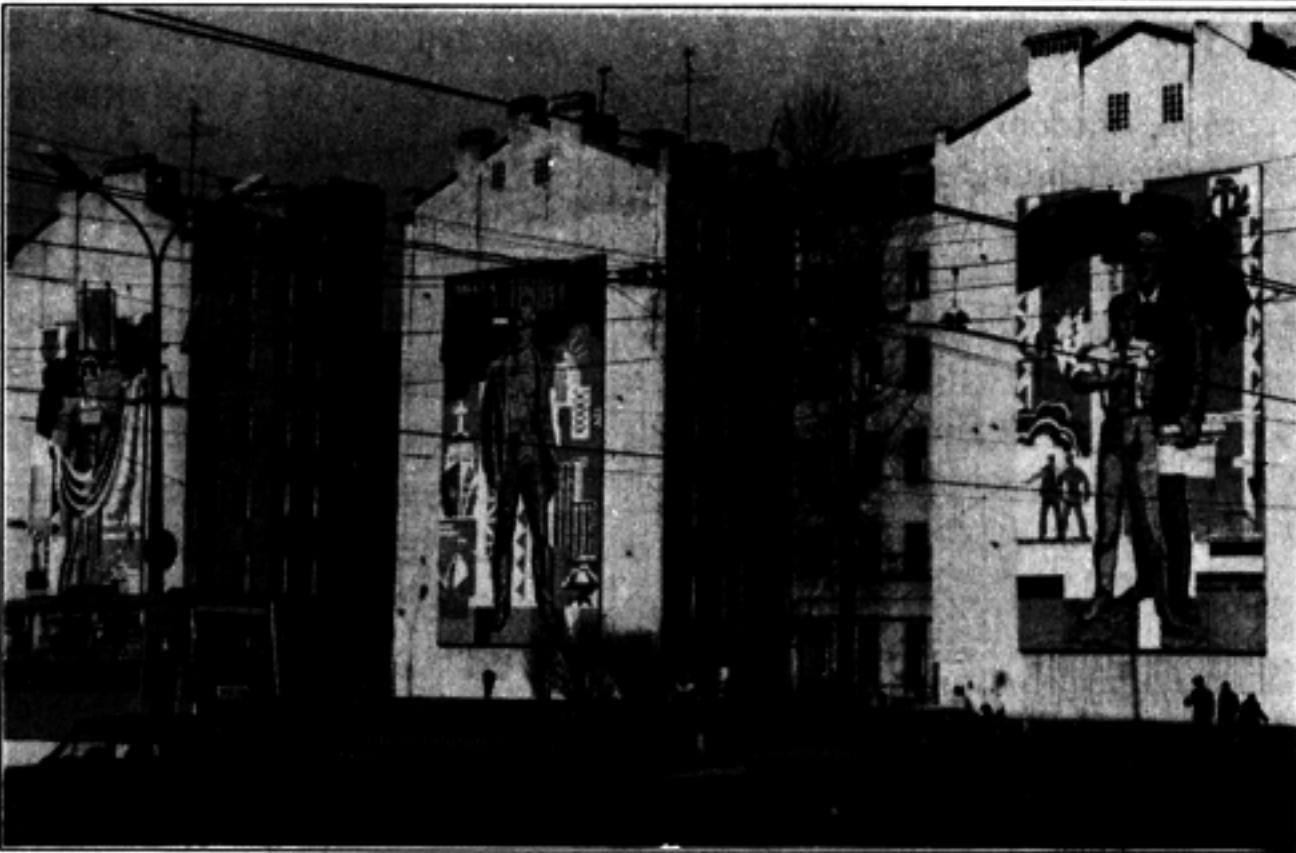
The Soviet Union occupies almost one-sixth of the land surface of the earth. It is a huge country, in which it takes longer to go from Moscow on the west side of the USSR to Vladivostok on the east coast, than it takes to get from Johannesburg to Moscow. The Union is (at the moment) made up of 15 Soviet Socialist Republics, inhabited by more than a hundred different nationalities.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the CPSU, has been in power since 1917. Since then, its authority has become entrenched and, until

recently, no other political parties were tolerated. In 1977, while Brezhnev was still president, a new constitution was adopted, Article Six of which guaranteed the leading role of the party in Soviet life.

The party is the most significant organisation in the country. Other 'public organisations', as they are called, include the Communist Youth organisation (Komsomol), the Young Pioneers, the All Union Co-ordinating Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU), women's organisations, professional and cultural structures, and various international groups. One of the latter is the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, who were our hosts on our trip. All such structures operate with the sanction of the party.

The USSR is going through the most dramatic changes it has experienced since the October Revolution, 73 years ago. The only thing that is certain in the Soviet Union today is that the society will continue to change. No-one can predict what form these changes will actually take.



Murals depicting the socialist vision - but real life never matched the vision

Photo: Morice Smithers/Labour Bulletin

It is no secret that there are some people who believe not only that what President Mikhail Gorbachev* is doing is a betrayal of socialism, but also that it would be better to return to life as it was under Stalin. This is partly because since Stalin's time, Soviet people have had to endure the corruption and stagnation of Brezhnev's rule, and now the economic and social turmoil of the changes under Gorbachev. The distance of time allows people to remember the good things about the past and for some, Stalin's era represents growth and stability, law and order.

Official visit

Our visit was an official one. Our hosts, the Afro-Asian

Solidarity Committee, support liberation struggles taking place in countries in Africa and Asia. The Soviet Union has traditionally supported anti-colonial liberation struggles, and has provided consistent support for the ANC in South Africa. They are, however, currently re-assessing their foreign policy in the light of glasnost, perestroika and the disarmament discussions taking place between it and the USA. They were therefore very interested in hearing from us as members of white UDF affiliates what we thought of their past policy towards South Africa and possible approaches in the future.

We were encouraged at all stages to ask as many questions

as possible. There was a strong sense that the Soviet people as a whole, not just officials of the party and the government, were all involved in discussions about the future of the country and of the economic and political system.

One of the effects of the command system** in the USSR was that, contrary to the basic principles of socialism, ordinary citizens could not participate meaningfully in the decision-making pro-

cesses of their society. Nor were a large number of them very political. As a result, most citizens adopted a passive role, concerning themselves more with how they could overcome the difficulties of daily life in the USSR than with contributing to the development of the society. The enthusiasm and ideological commitment which had generated the revolution, won the civil war, built a powerful new nation, and defeated the Germans in the Great Patriotic War, dissolved into apathy and disinterest.

This is beginning to change. With glasnost and perestroika, ordinary people feel they now have the right to comment and criticise and suggest, and they use that right. The result is a very wide range of opinions about the

* Gorbachev is credited with introducing 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' into Soviet society. Glasnost means 'openness' and indicates a general freeing of the political process, with more freedom of speech and the press. Perestroika means 'restructuring'. It is most commonly understood as economic restructuring, but Gorbachev says in his book *Perestroika*, that it involves the restructuring of all aspects of society - the economic, the social and the political in all their manifestations.

** By the 'command system' of politics and the economy is meant the centralised control of all aspects of Soviet life, with decisions being taken at the top and instructions sent down through the various levels of society. This led to bureaucratisation and a fundamental lack of democracy.

Freedom of the press

There is a new, though uneven, freedom of the press. Most papers in the Soviet Union are produced through official publishing houses or as official organisational papers. Before Gorbachev, they would always toe the party line, raising very few questions about the party or the government. This is still partly true today. Some papers make only the criticisms that the party approves. But there are a number of papers which are much more independent. They see their role as exposing contradictions and unfulfilled promises, and making what they consider to be necessary criticisms, even if the party and government do not like them. At the same time they will give praise where praise is due.

A member of the editorial staff of the Komsomol newspaper, *Smerna*, in Leningrad, spoke to us about the paper:

"Our publishers, the regional and city Komsomol committees, feel we must only write about Komsomol issues. We feel that because there are so few newspapers in the city, we must inform people about broader issues. Our daily circulation is 300 000 and most of our readers are in the 30 - 40 year age group.

"We write especially about people's power. At the time of the elections, we supported the position of the most radical candidates, some of whom are deputies today. We also do write a lot about Komsomol, but because Komsomol is in a deep crisis, we have to write about that. Sometimes we find it very difficult to say anything positive about Komsomol.

"I wouldn't say that there is censorship as such in the Soviet Union. The publishers do sometimes try to stop us from writing some things, saying that these are not youth issues and so on. But we believe that any problem of politics is a youth problem today. Of course, the editor-in-chief can be removed. After all, he or she is the one who decides on the ideological and political content of the newspaper. But it wouldn't be possible to remove the editor-in-chief without a scandal these days.

"But I must say this has been a very hot summer politically and I felt myself very uneasy and I felt it dangerous to come to work. But democracy is there."

against those who wanted to 'strangle this Communist infant at birth', as Winston Churchill was said to have urged. A bitter civil war, encouraged and supported materially by the capitalist powers, dominated the first three years of its new life.

When the Bolsheviki swept to power in 1917, they were confronted by a deeply feudal society, much of which had been untouched by the industrial revolution. But in a relatively short period of time, the Soviet Union built itself into a leading industrial giant. However, this was done at terrible cost. One of Stalin's methods of ensuring success was to use force against those who opposed his plans. For example, millions of peasants died as a result of his policy of forced collectivisation.

The country was also to achieve the socialist goal of providing for the basic human needs of all its citizens.

These included:

- the development of a system of free education for all up to and including university level
- a health system which provided for all
- major medical breakthroughs which have been adopted world-wide
- guaranteed employment for all
- the opening up, and development of, undeveloped and underdeveloped regions of its vast territory
- the provision of housing for all
- the narrowing of the differences in wealth between

past, the present and the future should be. For the first time in decades, Soviet people feel they can play some part in determining the social, political and economic form of their society.

Excessive criticism

Though everyone we met welcomed the new atmosphere in the USSR, many people were concerned about a tendency to reject everything about the country's past. They them-

selves denounced Stalinism, the command economic and political system, and the illegalities that had occurred. But they cautioned against an approach which seemed to deny the achievements of the Soviet Union. They disagreed with the view that the revolution stopped when Lenin died and was only now starting up again.

For example, little is said about the successful battle the young Soviet society waged

the richest and the poorest republics through re-distribution of resources

But while in the 1970s, the Soviet economy produced more steel, cement, textiles and machine tools than the USA, it has not adjusted to international changes in production processes, especially in the electronics field. This stagnation has contributed significantly to the current economic crisis. In consequence, there has been a deterioration in living standards, with a crisis in the supply of basic consumer goods and social services such as the health and education systems.

Estonian nationalism

On the plane to Moscow, we had our first encounter with ordinary Soviet people. A group of Estonians provided us with our first taste of how serious the nationalities question is in the Soviet Union.

They explained that they supported perestroika, but felt that it wasn't going far enough or fast enough. They wanted to see an end to control of their republic from Moscow, through the granting of political and economic autonomy. Just before the Second World War, the then independent Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, were an-

nexed by the Soviet Union. In all three republics, citizens are now demanding the right to control their own affairs and to preserve their own cultures. Estonia, for example, has just over a million inhabitants. Of these, 40% are Russians from one of the three Slavic republics. Estonians therefore feel threatened by what they call the Russification of their republic and fear that if the percentage gets any higher, they will be dominated by interests different to those of the Estonian nation.

The Baltic republics are the closest of the smaller republics to the west and have therefore been more exposed to the western way of life. They are particularly impressed by the social democratic societies of Scandinavia, where they see people living very well, while at the same time having the benefits of a comprehensive social welfare system. According to them, this is what socialism promises, but has failed to achieve. They feel particularly strongly that of all the republics they are the most economically productive, but that the wealth that they produce is controlled from Moscow and not by themselves.*

The Estonians we met said

they did not want to secede from the Soviet Union. They felt they were too much a part of the USSR to stand alone or to join with the west. They felt that with real political and economic autonomy within the union, they could act as a bridge between the west and the east. One wonders whether they still hold that view in the light of developments taking place in neighbouring Lithuania.

Arrival in Moscow

Moscow is a city of 9 million people, most of whom live in high-rise flats. It seems even Politburo members live in flats rather than houses. Housing is supposed to be allocated in a fairly egalitarian fashion. So those who need more space - families with children for example - are entitled to move to larger flats. But there is something of a shortage in Moscow and so it isn't always easy to get accommodation quickly.

Until recently all housing was state-owned. Now co-operative housing is being allowed as a way of meeting the housing crisis, and people are able to buy their own flats in a co-operative block. But the high cost involved means that people still have to do with fairly small accommodation.**

* *The re-distribution of the wealth produced in the wealthier republics to the poorer through central planning, has benefited the Soviet people as a whole. The standard of living in some of the southern and Asian republics has improved, and does not lag behind that of the more well-off territories as much as it used to. There is, however, still a large difference - of the 41 million who are below the poverty line as stated above, the majority are in the southern republics. This re-distributive system also benefits the Baltic Republics themselves. They do not have natural resources and are thus reliant on supplies of natural gas and other energy sources from the other republics. As part of the Soviet Union, they are able to get these supplies at very cheap rates.*

** *In parts of the country, especially in some of the Asian republics, there is apparently a very serious housing shortage. Gorbachev has pledged to have every Soviet citizen decently housed by the year 2000.*

Propaganda and prejudice

Inevitably, a visitor from the West will look carefully to see which of the things he or she has read and heard about the Soviet Union is true. Just as inevitably, we found during our visit that some things are true, some are exaggerated, and others are blatant lies.

Living in the west, and in South Africa in particular, has made it very difficult to know the truth about the Soviet Union. On the one hand, most rational people realise that much that is said against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries is simplistic anti-communist propaganda. On the other hand, there has been a tendency among some in the progressive movement to reject anything negative that is said about these countries as being necessarily untrue. This was especially so because of the gratitude the democratic movement has for the consistent support given to our struggle by the USSR.

It was also felt that by criticising any aspect of life in the socialist countries, one was criticising and undermining socialism itself. In the light of the continued ideological onslaught against socialism by the West, this was seen as unacceptable. This view has however been challenged of late by, amongst others, Joe Slovo of the South African Communist Party. In a paper published in *Labour Bulletin* Vol. 14.6 entitled *Has socialism failed?*, he says: 'We should not allow ourselves to be inhibited (in our criticisms)

merely because an exposure of our failures will provide ammunition to the traditional enemies of socialism: our silence will, in any case, present them with even more powerful ammunition.'

Meetings

Our visit was taken up mainly with meetings with various official bodies. These included:

- Institute for the Study of the Economies of World Socialist Systems.
- School of Journalism at Moscow State University
- Patrice Lumumba Peace and Friendship University
- All Union Co-ordinating Council of Trade Unions (International Department)
- The Foreign Office
- Friendship and Peace Committee
- Pioneers Palace in Leningrad
- Komsomol, the Communist Youth organisation
- The Africa Institute
- International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)
- A session of the Supreme Soviet, which is the Soviet parliament

At most of these meetings, it was clear that the participants were in broad agreement with perestroika and glasnost. At the same time, many of them were long-standing members of the party and the government or one of the various 'public organisations'. Gorbachev himself had been a staunch party member his whole life and had obviously given those in power before him no reason to believe that he was a threat to the existing order.

We asked a number of people how they had survived in the days before the new openness, when by their own admission, it was very difficult to challenge the status quo. Had they supported the old order or had they felt the same as they do today about Stalinism, about the command system, the bureaucracy, the corruption, the lack of freedom, the inefficiency of the economy and so on? If so, did they keep quiet about it, or were they able to express their dissent in a way which didn't brand them as dissidents, as happened, for example, to Andrei Sakharov?

We were never given a satisfactory answer to these questions. But they will have to be answered if we are to understand how what happened in the Soviet Union could have happened. It is also a question that has to be answered by, amongst others, the South African Communist Party.

In *Has socialism failed?*, Joe Slovo is unsparing in his criticism of Stalinism, but says that he makes "no attempt here to answer the complex question of why so many millions of socialists and genuine revolutionaries became such blind worshippers in the temple of the cult of the personality". This too will have to be answered at some point.

But it is necessary to go further and ask how it was that those who welcomed the end of Stalinism and the arrival of the reforming Krushchev, once again waited for the arrival of the new reformer

Gorbachev before they were prepared to criticise the distortions of socialism under Brezhnev.

Honesty

Many people told us that there had been a great many errors, and that the institutions which had been at the forefront of the society since the revolution were now having to bear the consequences of their failures.

Membership of the party, of Komsomol and the trade unions was either dropping or had become, for many, simply a means for achieving material gain. People we met admitted that they had joined the party because it could further their careers.

People who joined Komsomol knew that better jobs were guaranteed for them. Being in a position of power in the bureaucracy didn't necessarily mean a large salary - in many cases, party and other functionaries earn less than mine-workers - but it meant access to privileges not available to ordinary people.

The result has been ideological bankruptcy in many official structures. Today this is prompting people to turn to alternative organisations, such as independent worker structures and the Popular Fronts that have been formed in many

ANC students

The Patrice Lumumba University of Peace and Friendship was established 30 years ago to provide an international gesture of educational solidarity. Students from all over the world, especially from developing countries, come to the university to study. Many are from liberation movements like the ANC which enjoy the support of the Soviet Union in their struggles. On our visit to the university, we met a number of ANC students who were studying economics, medicine and law. Some had been born in exile, others left after the 1976 and subsequent uprisings. All were keenly aware of developments in South Africa and excited at the prospect that they might be able to come home soon, particularly as they would have skills to contribute to the development of a new South Africa.

Below: ANC students join us in a toast to the future as we share a meal in a co-operative Georgian restaurant. *Photo: Don Pinnock*



of the republics as a political challenge to the party. In recent elections at various levels of government, the Communist Party has lost a large number of seats to candidates representing both socialist and non-socialist groups.

Komsomol is beginning to look for alternative sources of income - for example, in setting up co-operatives - as membership drops and the income from membership fees shrinks. Ten years ago they boasted a membership figure of 43 million. Today they have

33 million and expect this to drop to 23 million as the youth leave to join other organisations.

In the past, Communist youth were at the forefront of the revolution. They were the ones who were the 'subbotniks'*, who gave up their Saturdays to do voluntary labour and help to build communist society. Today Komsomol acknowledges that a large percentage of the youth are alienated and frustrated. They are no longer motivated by ideological issues, but by

* *Literal translation is Saturdays*

their desire for a better life, the kind of life that socialism always promised them, but never delivered. It is the youth that is mainly involved in black marketing on the streets* and it was from the youth that we heard the angriest attacks on communism.

The changing role of the party

The party has 18 million members out of a population of 280 million. The leadership has had to face the fact that the constitutional guarantee of the leading role of the party, as enshrined in Article Six, will not win the loyalty of the people. This must be won through the ballot box and maintained through hard work and service.

While we were there, there was much debate about whether Article Six should be scrapped and other parties allowed to contest for power. Many opposed such a move, especially the old guard who felt that the revolution was being betrayed by perestroika. Gorbachev himself said that such a move was premature. However, only three months later, it was decided to take such a step. The party is no longer constitutionally privileged, and will have to face opposition within a multi-party system.

Trade unions

The official trade unions also lack credibility because they



Soviet unionist reads the Labour Bulletin under the watchful eye of Lenin

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

have not been an independent force in society. They were seen to represent the interests of the party and of the government, often sacrificing the interests of their members. (See the article on the Soviet miners' strike in *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 4) In the end, they became nothing more than a sort of welfare society. They boast a membership of 99,5% of the workforce, but acknowledge that people joined partly because of pressure from society and their colleagues, and partly because of the social benefits they would enjoy.

One union official admitted that when workers found themselves in trouble, they would generally turn to the party first, the management of the enterprise where they worked second, and only as a

last resort would they seek help from their union. He admitted that the federation was facing a threat from independent unions and that the federation had taken a decision to distance itself from the party. Significantly, he said that the unions would take issue with the party and the state on the question of economic change under perestroika which was not always in the interests of the working class.

Economic changes

Perestroika has brought a restructuring of foreign policy based on both economic and political considerations. The Soviet Union cannot afford to bolster the socialist economies of other countries such as Cuba, and intervene militarily in support of socialist governments forever. The Soviet government has had to admit that too much money went into their foreign programmes, and too little into improving the living standards of their own people. The build-up of arms in competition with the United States was also a serious drain on the economy and could not be sustained indefinitely.

Economic restructuring was the topic of discussion in the Supreme Soviet on the day that we attended a session.** The Supreme Soviet is the country's parliament. While it used to be regarded as something of a rubber stamp for decisions already made by the party, its current sessions are usually characterised by vigor-

* The most common form we encountered was the trade in foreign currency

** We were told that we were the first SA passport holders ever to be allowed to attend such a session.

ous debate. This is partly due to the spirit of glasnost and partly because the election process for choosing delegates has changed. In the past, it was simply a case of endorsing selected party candidates. Today people have something of a choice as to who they want to represent them.

The discussion in this particular session centred on the question of the ownership of property. One of the key issues being debated in the Soviet Union is its economic structure. Gorbachev, like Lenin before him who introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) to encourage economic growth in the early twenties, has recognised that flexibility is required to ensure such growth. As a result, economic forms are being considered which would once have been rejected as anti-socialist. One speaker at the Supreme Soviet even spoke of 'socialist free enterprise', which he hastened to say didn't violate the basic principles of what socialism was meant to be. But things are changing so fast that there is confusion as to what socialism really is, what principles actually underpin it, and what constitutes flexibility as opposed to a betrayal of socialist values when it comes to making economic changes.

Conclusion

One conclusion that we can safely reach is that socialism as the world has known it since 1917, will never be the same again. But what we also learnt in the Soviet Union is that, in acknowledging the er-

Women

One of the rallying calls of the early Communist movement was for the liberation of women. After the revolution in the Soviet Union, attention was indeed paid to this issue.

Yet today the picture is not very promising. Women are very seldom represented at the highest level of government. It is rare to hear a woman speaking on behalf of the government or the foreign office. A woman professor said, for example, that it was very unlikely that a woman would represent the country as an ambassador. When asked why, she said, "It wasn't really a woman's job."

On the other hand, women are very active in the professions and in science and education. There is also no social hindrance on women doing the most menial work, such as street sweeping.

Women continue to carry the burden of raising the family and maintaining the household. A woman member of the Communist Party said that women carry a triple burden: working for a wage, looking after the home, and standing in queues to buy household requirements. She said she was tired of waiting for men to accept that they should share household tasks with women. The only solution, she said, was to pay men more so that at least women wouldn't have to go out and work as well as having to do all the shopping and housework.*

In the Supreme Soviet, we saw a large number of women delegates. This may or may not be a result of glasnost. It seems likely, though, that in the new conditions, the issue of gender equality will once again be taken seriously. ☆

"In his book 'Perestroika', Gorbachev risked the anger of women by calling for conditions which allow women to return to their 'purely womanly mission'. He acknowledges the advances made in the sphere of women's liberation and their contributions to society, but questions whether this hasn't undermined the 'true' role of women and resulted in social problems as a result of 'the loosening of family ties'. He doesn't address at all the fact that part of the problem is that men don't contribute adequately to family responsibilities.

rors of the past, dedicated socialists and communists are prepared to work to create a society based on socialist values, in spite of the long road that is ahead. With the opening of the political process, many different political forces will be competing for the support of the masses. Socialists and communists will have to work hard to overcome the suspicion bred by decades of distorted socialism, and they

acknowledge that only patience, flexibility and a truly democratic process will make this possible.

Gorbachev is on record as saying that what the West fears most is that, purged of the aberrations of the past, socialism will yet transform itself into an attractive, achievable and moral alternative to the world domination of capitalism. History, as usual, will be the test. ☆

SATS strike sing-along

a review of *Township Fever*

by Carol Steinberg*

Never before has the Market Theatre managed to entice so many comrades away from their meetings to watch a play. What's more, the debate generated by Mbongeni Ngema's *Township Fever* has been intense - matched only by Albie Sachs' recent provocative article on the relationship between art and politics in the South African struggle.

Undoubtedly, *Township Fever* is a controversial play. Based on actual events, the story line is simple. It traces the life of Jazz Mngadi, a young musician forced to seek stable employment in order to marry the woman of his dreams. He finds work on the railways and joins the COSATU affiliate in this industry, the South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU). His employment coincides with the beginning of the famous South African Transport System (SATS) strike of 1987, and we witness the strike through his eyes.

We see the misery and anger of the workers caused by the unsatisfactory working conditions at SATS. SATS refuses to negotiate with SARHWU. As the strike escalates, police violence and scab labour are used to break the strike. The play shows workers grappling with these problems in COSATU House and arguing as to how they should deal with scabs.

We now know that following

this meeting, four scabs were stabbed and burnt to death by some SARHWU members. In a tense and powerful scene, we see a balaclavaed informer picking out the culprits. The accused reconstruct the story under cross-examination in court. Four SARHWU members are sentenced to death.

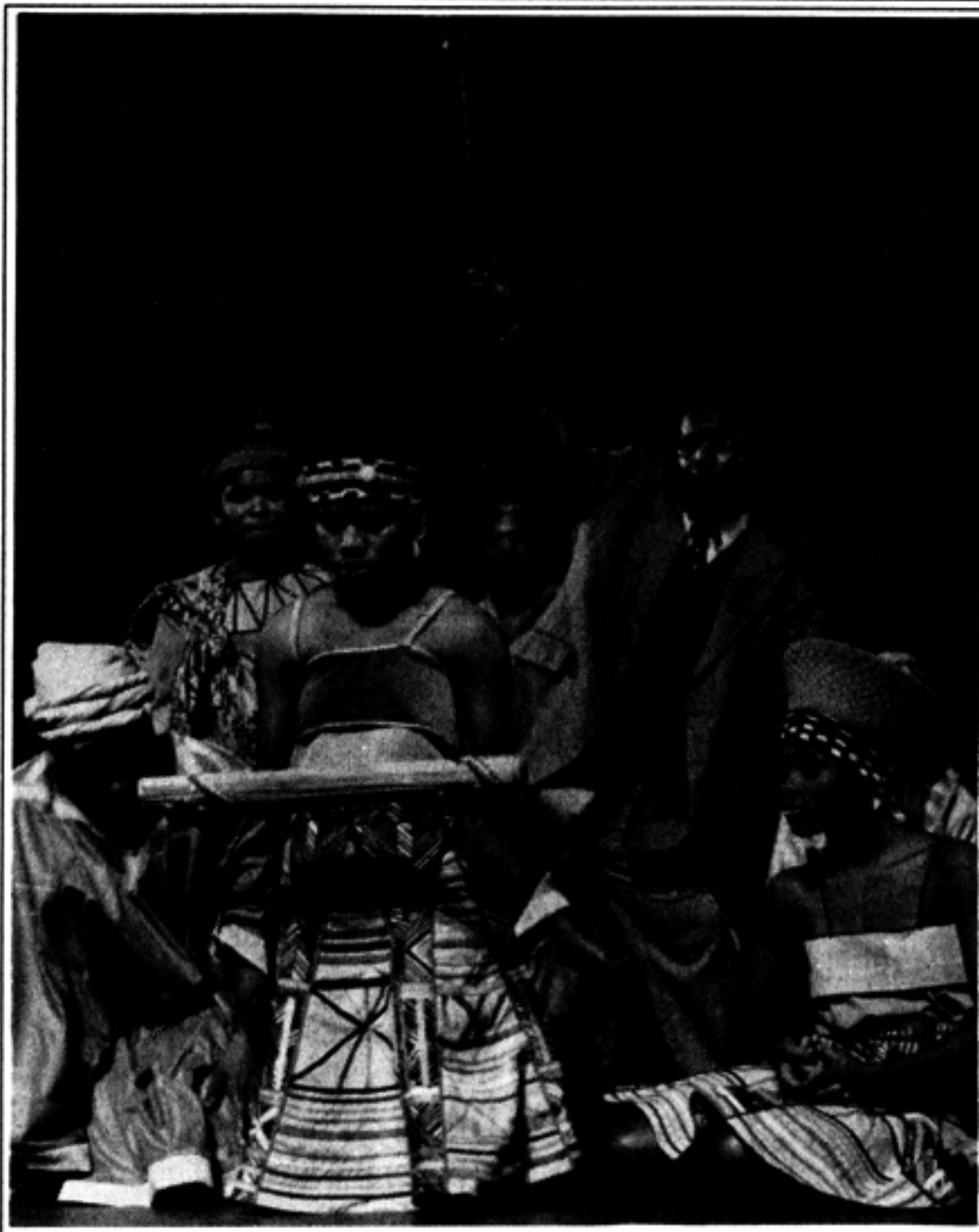
COSATU raises objections

Township Fever raised a cry of objection from parts of the union movement. "It has grossly misquoted our Federation", says the COSATU Living Wage Group. "SARHWU and some of its members have been poorly portrayed ... the objectives and aims of the play are not intended to express the true reflections of the working class and its allies".

Ngema feels otherwise. He was intrigued by the fact, he says, that "all the accused guys were just honest working people who had been subjected to incredible forces during the cycle of violence which accompanied the April 1987 strike". He says that he was "fascinated by the idea that people without any criminal record could be compelled to commit gruesome acts totally out of character with their personalities and their morality under the forces of ... a 'pressure-cooker' situation".

Ngema wanted to show that apartheid dehumanises not only the

* Carol Steinberg is a cultural activist. She lectures at Wits Drama Department



The play tries to show how "honest working people" can be compelled by events to "commit gruesome acts totally out of character with their personalities". It does not succeed.

Photo: Courtesy of the Market Theatre

oppressor but also the oppressed, that it could have been "me or any person" who became desperate enough to commit such gruesome acts.

Serious issues trivialised

Contrary to press reports, the COSATU Living Wage Group did not attempt to censor the play. COSATU officials agreed that while political organisations are free to protest against a play that offends them, they do not have the right to close it down. Nevertheless, the deep unhappiness that the COSATU officials ex-

pressed about the way in which workers are depicted in the play, must be seriously considered.

Ngema made a play that purports to represent real historical events. Clearly he has a responsibility to depict those events as accurately as possible. That responsibility deepens when there is so much at stake in the way the events are interpreted. In this case, four people's lives are in the balance: the SARHWU members sitting on death row.

An accurate interpretation of events does not simply en-

tail constructing dialogue from interviews and court records. This much Ngema did. It also involves subjective factors, like the characterisation of the people involved.

In the version of *Township Fever* that I saw, some of the workers were depicted as simple-minded clowns at inappropriate moments. When the accused were giving evidence in court, for example, one of the characters lisped and mispronounced certain words. It was difficult to focus on what he was saying - that he was setting scabs alight - because the humour of his language dominated. This served to trivialise the seriousness of the issues at hand.

This is not to suggest that workers must be depicted as flawless and serious heroes. Laughter often helps to draw an audience into a play, and we gain many insights from seeing ourselves parodied on the stage.

Besides, strike violence is a very complex issue. No doubt workers and unions have made mistakes in handling the tension around strikes.

If plays are to help us learn from our mistakes, they need to honestly and accurately explore the full complexity of the issues involved. The courage of the SARHWU strikers must certainly be depicted, but so must their shortcomings. Perhaps the COSATU Living Wage Group is over-sensitive about this.

Can the play be reworked?

Ngema has been responsive to the COSATU officials' criti-

cisms. He has agreed to rework and exclude parts of the script in consultation with SARHWU members. Ngema set out to tell a very powerful and important story. My impression of the play was that from the start, he sincerely attempted to make a play that was sympathetic to COSATU and which represented the views of the SARHWU workers. Where did he go wrong? Will a reworking of selected scenes solve the play's problems?

In my opinion, there is a fundamental disparity between the story that Ngema wanted to tell, and the type of theatre that he chose in order to tell it. It would seem he was so busy creating an impressive theatrical spectacle of perfectly choreographed dancing and harmonious voices, that he neglected to tell the story.

Township Fever is a musical extravaganza in the Broadway tradition. It is performed by a cast of nearly forty actors and a fourteen-part orchestra. The story line takes second place to the spectacle of song and dance. Too often, the song has little to do with the story of the strike.

Ngema's intention was to show how an ordinary person is driven to commit acts of gruesome violence. He succeeds in showing that Jazz and his fellow workers are ordinary people rather than criminal or unbalanced. They play music, squabble with their families, fall in love, participate in their community.

But the play fails to explain convincingly what compelled Jazz to kill the scabs. We get a

general sense of the brutalities committed by SATS management and the police, and the horror of watching one's fellow workers being gunned down in the streets.

But *Township Fever* does not convey a detailed picture of the forces in apartheid society that drive ordinary human beings to violence. There was no sense that because of the actions of SATS management and the police, attacking scabs was the workers' last resort: it was the only

If plays are to help us learn from our mistakes, they need to honestly and accurately explore the full complexity of the issues involved.

way they could win the strike. Nor does the play succeed in making its audience identify with the SATS workers, see the world through their eyes, make us understand the pain and anger that made them kill. The characters are too often buffooning and can-canning for this process to occur.

It is perhaps in the incomplete story, in the glib and flashy nature of this type of Broadway musical, that the dramatic and political shortcomings of *Township Fever* lie. A splendid theatrical event was created, but the story remained untold. For this reason,

I am sceptical that minor cuts and changes to the script will rectify the play's flaws.

Popular theatre

The Broadway musical form might be an inadequate way of telling our stories, but it certainly makes for popular theatre. *Township Fever* draws large, enthusiastic audiences from Johannesburg and the townships. That is a rare feat for a play in South Africa. Theatre workers want people to come and see their plays, and we respect the responses of our audiences. How do we reconcile these sentiments with the fact of a popular play that we find inadequate or even offensive?

South African plays have been our anti-apartheid newspapers abroad. Their unique ability to show the subjective horrors of apartheid South Africa has mobilised international audiences. No doubt *Township Fever* will be highly acclaimed in New York, where it was destined to go from its inception. Perhaps the play will have more value for American audiences who know less about recent South African history, and are less sensitive to the politics of our times. Perhaps in the American context, the anti-apartheid message of the play will be less marred by its shortcomings, and *Township Fever's* call to abolish the death sentence will echo loudly through the streets of Broadway. ☆

Negotiating strike rules and rights - the Hextex Strike

by Ibrahim Patel, SACTWU education officer

The strike at Hextex, a worsted textile mill in a little Boland town called Worcester, involved 1 020 workers. It lasted 47 days. The strike was, according to Andrew Levy's annual report, the fifth longest strike in South Africa in 1989. It is the only strike mentioned by name in the Barlow Rand 1989 Annual Report.

Before the strike the company and the union agreed to the following:

- the right to strike without fear of dismissal
- access for strikers to the company's canteen during the strike
- access for union officials during the strike.
- on-site picket facilities for strikers.

We further agreed on the number of strikers to have access and picket rights:

- 50% of the number of workers in favour of a strike could have access
- 10% of the number of workers who vote in favour of a strike could have picket facilities.

In return the union gave the following undertakings:

- the strike ballot would be conducted by the union on company premises, but the management would have full rights to observe that the ballot was fair and secret, and that the wording on the ballot paper was fair and accurate.
- the union would issue a written

set of strike rules to members, calling for a disciplined strike, and urging members to refrain from violence.

- the union would give the company at least eight hours notice of the commencement of the strike.

Further protections were built into the agreement:

1. Should any striker break the access or picket rules, such striker would be barred from the factory for the duration of the strike.

2. A special contact committee was set up between the union and management, to meet immediately if any of the agreed rules were broken or if the behaviour of any striker was cause for concern.

The strike ballot was conducted and:

- 698 workers voted for a strike
- 207 against
- 7 votes were spoilt.

The strike started on 18 May and ended on 4 July 1989. One thousand and forty workers started the strike, and at its conclusion, 1 020 were still on strike.

Scabs and pickets

During the course of the strike, the company tried to recruit temporary scab labour from the local community and from outlying farm dorpias. The union used the on-site picket facility to discourage the scab labour, and we formed anti-scab committees consisting of three people each, to visit all non-stri-



Hextex - strike shows merit of pickets and access

Photo: ACTWUSA NEWS

kers. Each picket committee was headed by a picket line marshal who had to ensure that the strict union rules were followed. No force, threats or foul language were permitted. In general we tried to use strikers drawn from the same department as the scabs, to do the house visits. This allowed for maximum peer pressure, and reduced the chances of violence.

The picket line was disciplined, and monitored by the union's picket marshals. It was a colourful line of posters and songs, not knives and weapons.

The factory canteen was used to hold union programmes, with poetry, poster making, T-shirt printing, prayer sessions and music sessions to occupy the strikers and ward off boredom and desperation. It was an excellent

forum to inform strikers of the progress of the strike, and so avoid rumour and the spread of alarmist information.

The textile division of Barlow Rand is 90% unionised by our trade union, but we found it unnecessary to call out our members at other plants. In general, workers at other Barlow plants raised strike funds, held factory solidarity meetings and sent messages of support and groceries to the strikers.

Workers stop management's plans

In one instance when management tried to transfer production from Hextex to Veldspun, a parallel Barlows operation in Uitenhage, prompt action by the workforce at Veldspun nipped the plan in the bud.

When it appeared that some

advisors in the Barlows Group were urging the local management to dismiss the strikers, we planned for a Group-wide strike, sought the assistance of workers at the main clothing customers of Hextex, and advised the export customers of Hextex of this new development. In the event, such reciprocal escalation of the strike proved to be unnecessary.

During the strike no one was killed, assaulted or even slapped. The complete lack of violence was matched by a restrained focus on the economic issues in the strike. No grandstand demands were made by the union, other than the payment of a service bonus on a formula accepted throughout the textile industry.

47 days later

By the end of the strike, with 47 days of economic pain to both sides, the basic relationship between the union and the company remained civil and sound. On the return to work, stewards were able to assist the management in getting production running after the longest break in the mill's 41 year history.

In summary, when the parties at Hextex realised that they had reached deadlock in their substantive negotiations, we negotiated a package of rights and duties which ensured that the strike, when it took place, was conducted in a peaceful, calm manner and that it was a genuine economic trial of strength, and that after 47 days there were no corpses which marked its passage. ☆

Changing labour law in the public sector

The Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) discusses changing trends in labour law governing the public sector

What is the 'public sector'?

The public sector is a wide term describing the public service, Department of Posts and Telecommunications, South African Transport Services (now Transnet and the South African Rail Commuter Corporation Ltd.), parastatal institutions, and local authorities. The 'public service', on the other hand, is a narrower term describing the administration of Parliament, Provincial Administrations, and various government departments such as the Department of Justice, Department of Manpower, the various education departments, the South African Defence Force and the South African Police.

The public sector and the Labour Relations Act

There is a commonly held view that the public sector is totally excluded from the Labour Relations Act (the LRA). This is not correct. Section 2 of the LRA only excludes persons employed by the state. This exclusion applies to the public service, Transnet and the Department of Posts and Telecommunications. It does not, however, apply to all parastatal institutions and to local authorities. The employees of ESKOM and the SABC for example therefore fall under the LRA. Local authority employees, like essential service workers, are prohibited by

the LRA from striking and all disputes are referred to compulsory arbitration. The position of these employees was dealt with in *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14.6.

Trade unions in the public service, Transnet and Department of Posts and Telecommunications can be registered if they have only state employees as members. This does not however allow them to use other rights contained in the LRA, such as access to the Industrial Court. The Industrial Registrar is not entitled to register a trade union composed partly of state employees and partly of private sector employees.

South African Transport Services (SATS - now Transnet)

The employment of workers in SATS is governed by the South African Transport Services Conditions of Service Act. There are also numerous regulations, most importantly the consolidated Service Conditions. The SATS Act is the most recent piece of legislation governing workers in the public sector and reflects the most recent trends.

The SATS Act distinguishes different categories of employees including "casual", "temporary" and "permanent" employees. Only South African citizens can be temporary or permanent employees. Non-South African

citizens employed by Transnet are casual employees. Temporary employees become permanent after two years if they comply with certain requirements laid down in the consolidated Service Conditions.

The consolidated Service Conditions contain a disciplinary procedure which came into effect on 1 September 1989. This provides for disciplinary hearings at which a worker may be represented in the case of more serious offences. However, there is no proper hearing for less serious offences. Line supervisors make the decision on what disciplinary action to take, and the process is therefore open to abuse.

The SATS Act prohibits strikes. It is an offence to instigate, incite or take part in a strike. The normal disciplinary procedure does not apply in a strike. If SATS believes that a worker is participating in a strike it can issue him with a notice giving him three days to provide a written explanation for not doing his normal duties. After this period SATS has the right to terminate the services of the workers on strike.

The SATS Act established a Labour Council. Its objective is maintaining and promoting labour peace and preventing disputes. The Labour Council has representatives of trade unions which are formally recognised by SATS, and representatives of SATS management. Trade unions

may only become members of the Labour Council if they have been accepted by a three quarters majority of the Council. Each trade union has one vote on the Labour Council, regardless of its size. SATS has the same number of votes as the trade unions combined.

Transnet

On 15 March 1989 the Legal Succession Act to SATS was passed. This provides for the commercialisation, and possible privatisation, of SATS.

On 1 April 1990 all assets of SATS, except the rail commuter services, were transferred to a newly formed public company, Transnet. Presently the state is the only share holder in Transnet. All workers employed by SATS became employees of Transnet without any interruption of service.

The SATS Act will be repealed in October 1991. Until that date SATS will stay outside the LRA. But after October 1991 they will be regarded as private sector employees ie they will be covered by the LRA. However, the Legal Succession Act allows for the prohibition of strikes, even when these workers fall under the LRA. It provides that the relevant Minister may, if he considers it necessary in the public interest, impose a prohibition on lock-outs and strikes in respect of Transnet. The Legal Succession Act provides that Transnet, and

four fifths of the trade unions that are members of the Labour Council may decide to establish an Industrial Council. If this takes place within one year of the repeal of the SATS Act, the Labour Council will become the Industrial Council.

The Legal Succession Act did not transfer the passenger railway service of SATS to Transnet. This was transferred to a newly formed corporation, the South African Rail Commuter Corporation Limited. The affairs of this corporation are managed by a board of control appointed by the relevant Minister, but the law governing its employees will be similar to that governing Transnet. It will not be privatised.

The public service

The ultimate management authority for workers in the public service is the Commission for Administration. The main act governing the employment of workers in the public service is the Public Service Act. Again there are numerous relevant regulations, particularly the Public Service Staff Code. Numerous other Acts, such as the South African Police Act and the South African Defence Force Act, regulate employment in specific state departments.

The Public Service Act distinguishes 'employees' from 'officers.' Officers have a great deal of security of employment, while employees have very little job security.

There is no procedure for an employee to become an officer and, in practice, most black state workers remain employees for their entire working lives.

The Public Service Act has a full disciplinary procedure for 'officers' charged with misconduct. The Act does not provide a disciplinary procedure for an 'employee' charged with misconduct. The common law therefore applies. Recent Supreme Court cases have held that a temporary employee is entitled to a fair hearing before a decision can be taken to dismiss him for misconduct.

The Public Services Act makes no mention of strike action. It is often stated that it is illegal for workers in the public sector to engage in strike action. This is not true. There is, however, a bill before Parliament which proposes prohibiting strikes as the SATS Act does. The bill also proposes establishing a Public Services Central Bargaining Council which is similar to the SATS Labour Council.

Department of Posts and Telecommunications

● The employment of workers in the Department of Posts and Telecommunications is governed by the Post Office Service Act, which is very similar to the Public Service Act. Again there are numerous regulations, particularly the Personnel Staff Code. Like the Public Service Act, Post Office Act dis-

tinguishes 'employees' from 'officers'. As in the public service, 'employees' are mostly black, have little job security and no access to disciplinary procedure.

The Post Office Act does not prohibit strikes. However, legislation which is presently being considered proposes to prohibit strikes as the SATS Act does, and to establish a Negotiations Council.

Trends

The major legal trend in those parts of the public sector excluded from the LRA, is the prohibition of strikes. This is based on the idea that the whole of the public sector is an essential service. This idea however, goes against international trends which view essential services as far more limited than the public sector (see Legal Notes in *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 6).

The prohibition of strike action also ignores the reality of a labour relations in the public sector over the last few years. There have been major strikes in all parts of the public sector despite such prohibitions. The fact that there is no mechanism for workers in this sector to negotiate before taking legal strike action appears to promote conflict rather than prevent it.

A second major trend in those parts of the public sector excluded from the LRA is the establishment of central bargaining forums, such as

the SATS Labour Council. These forums appear to be similar to Industrial Councils in the private sector. However they are not democratic institutions. All trade unions have an equal vote, irrespective of how many members they have. The principle of proportional representation does not apply. This encourages the fragmentation of trade unions and entrenches the position of minority trade unions.

Another important issue is that government policies of privatisation will reshape the public sector. The Legal Succession Act provides for the possible privatisation of Transnet. It is likely that the government will also want to privatise the Department of Posts and Telecommunications.

Finally, the release in April of the National Manpower Commissions Working Document on changes to the LRA has added a new aspect to debates on the public sector. The working document recommends that most public sector workers - and others excluded categories such as domestic and farm workers - should be included in a single law covering labour relations. The only employees who would be excluded would be police and security personnel, who would however be able to form trade unions. If the Working Document proposals ever become law, it will radically change the legal position of public sector employees. ☆

Economic Notes

Economic Notes is written by Labour Research Service (LRS), Cape Town.

Rich man's budget

"To those that hath shall be given...."

This was the unseen text to Barend du Plessis' budget for 1990/91. Shareholders will get a bonanza because tax on dividends has been dropped completely. This means an extra 41% for high-earning shareholders.

That's not all. The tax on undistributed profits has been dropped (these are the profits re-invested in the company on behalf of shareholders). Mining tax has been reduced and tax rules for the new mines have been eased.

Shareholders who play the Johannesburg Stock Exchange like a casino will also benefit. This is because the tax on share trading will be phased out over a period of three years.

Workers pay a large part of their wage on General Sales Tax. Until now, however, there was no GST on fresh foods. This will change when the VAT is introduced in October 1991. VAT is a new type of indirect tax which hit the poorest people hardest. VAT will apply to all goods including food and other necessities.

Changes in PAYE tax deductions

Most workers will benefit from this budget in one way - their PAYE deduction will be reduced or even stopped altogether. The table shows how workers will be better off.

These reductions mean that workers will pay less tax even if they got a wage increase of 20% in January. This is the first real tax reduction for many years.

Where our taxes go

Here are some of the ways these millions were spent:

Defence	R10 300 million
Police	R3 000 million
Prisons	R800 million
Black education	R2 000 million
Housing	R1 000 million
Food subsidies	R200 million
Transport subsidies	R500 million

How they collected our taxes in 1989

The government took huge amounts from taxpayers last year. For example, individual taxpayers paid R18 900 million in PAYE. There was also R16 400 million from GST. Companies, however, paid only R11 000 million and the mines only R2 300 million. ☆

Changes in PAYE tax deductions

	1989 Per month	1990 Per month
Married with two children		
Start paying tax at	R916,67	R1 166,67
Tax on R1 000 per month	R 19,17	R 0,00
Unmarried		
Start paying tax at	R583,33	R 916,67
Tax on R1 000 per month	R 72,50	R 30,00
Married woman		
Start paying tax at	R375,00	R 416,67
Tax on R1 000 per month	R160,42	R 121,67

Police pay

Unemployment must be very bad if anyone is thinking of a career in the South African Police. If it's money that they are after they had better look elsewhere. This is what they could expect to earn. (See p 17 for the latest increases)

Rands per month

Constable	R484.50
Constable with matric	R833.25
Sergeant	R1 077.58
Warrant officer grade one	R1 526.00

A directors pay for the commissioner

But the officer class is well rewarded. The top brass commissioner of police earns R13 814 per month. This brings his pay into line with the directors of large companies such as CG Smith and Nedbank.

Racialism fuels strikes

Bear in mind that until recent-

Rands per month

First lieutenant	R1 904.75
Captain	R2 207.75
Major first grade	R2 546.75
Lieutenant colonel	R3 337.75
Colonel	R4 158.25
Assistant commissioner	R4 684.75
Senior adj commissioner	R7 283.50
Commissioner	R13 814.00

ly, there have been no black officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel, and the recent strikes by police and prison personnel around the country have been fuelled by allegations of racialism.

Considering that the job requires enforcing apartheid laws, there must be some other perks to make people do it! ☆

The building industry's stamp benefit system

The stamp benefit system is used in South Africa, as well as many other countries around the world. It is used to pay holiday pay and benefits to construction and building workers.

Approximately 90% of building and construction workers in South Africa are covered by the stamp benefit system.

Industrial council runs stamp system

A stamp is paid to workers each week. It contains the full value of employees weekly benefits. Employers buy the stamp from the industrial council.

Just before the building industry's annual closure, the stamps are handed to the industrial council. The holiday pay is then paid out to workers.

In the Cape Peninsula a general worker receives a stamp worth R34,80 (see the

pie chart) each week. This represents a quarter (25,5%) of the worker's total weekly wage.

R15 million in holiday pay was handed to building workers in the Western Province for the 1989/90 holiday period.

Some advantages

Without the stamp benefit system, building companies could take advantage of workers by declaring themselves bankrupt just before the annual holiday. They would then not have to provide holiday pay.

Furthermore, workers are assured that they will receive holiday pay even though they might move from one building employer to another during the year.

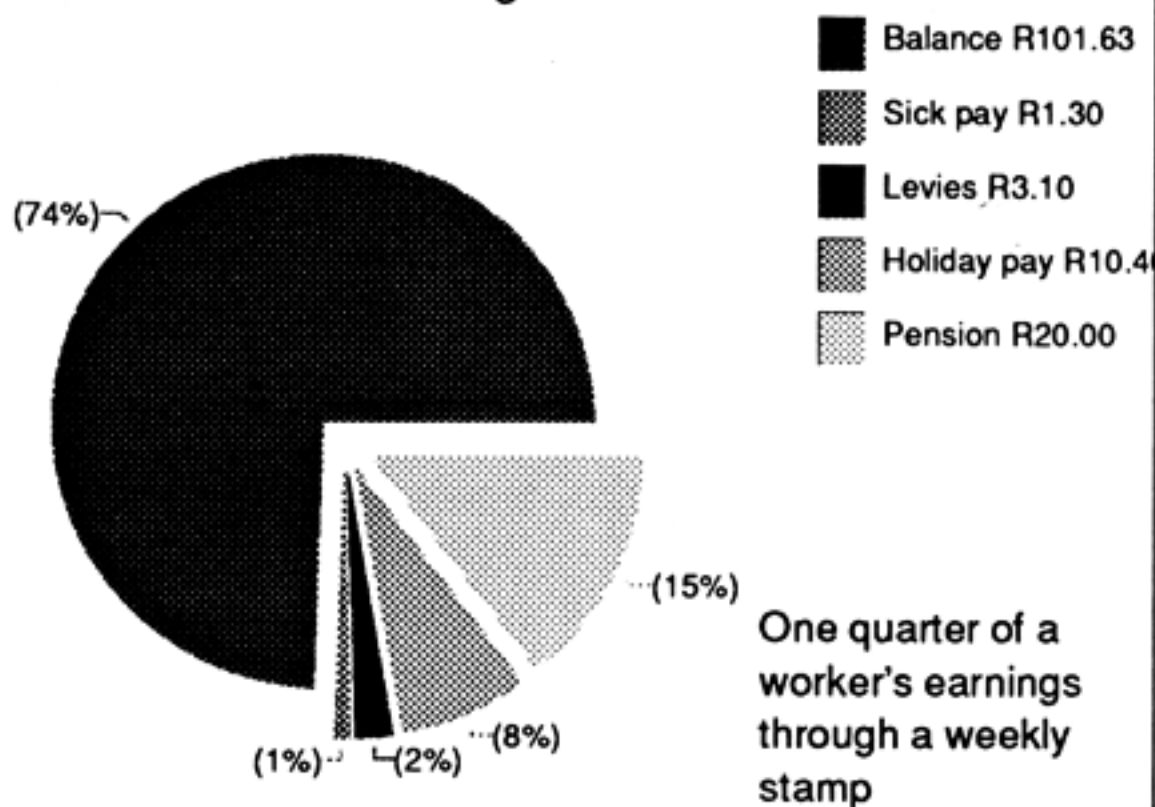
UCATT (the British Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians) find the stamp system to be the "most useful tool we have in organising construction sites". One of the first tasks a UCATT organiser is required to do when arriving at a site is to ensure that the company is providing workers with benefit stamps.

.....and disadvantages

The stamp benefit system is, however, far from perfect. Each month, industrial council agents in the Cape find between 100 and 130 employers abusing the system.

An LRS survey of workers' attitudes to the system showed considerable opposition. Much of the opposition to the system stems from the requirement that at least 20 hours is worked per week before a

Weekly pay and weekly stamp benefits on a wage of R136.43



stamp is received. For example, if only 19 hours is worked during the week the worker will receive no benefits.

The results of the survey also showed that a surprisingly large number of workers do not fully understand the stamp system. Because of this many workers lose their benefits. P

Company Profile: Old Mutual

Since 1980 the value of Old Mutual assets has risen almost ten times. Its assets grew by nearly one half to R46 552 million between 1988 and 1989.

The *Financial Mail Top Companies* survey in May 1989 ranked Old Mutual only second to ESKOM in terms of total assets. Old Mutual is by far the largest insurance company in South Africa.

Owned by policy holders...

Old Mutual is owned by its policyholders. Each policyholder has a vote, which entitles the holder to influence the policies and operations of the group. Each pension fund managed by Old Mutual also has a vote.

In his annual address, the former chairman, Dr J van der Horst, suggests that "the man in the street, through his participation in life assurance, retirement funds and unit trusts, actually owns a large

portion of the company".

..with little say over policy

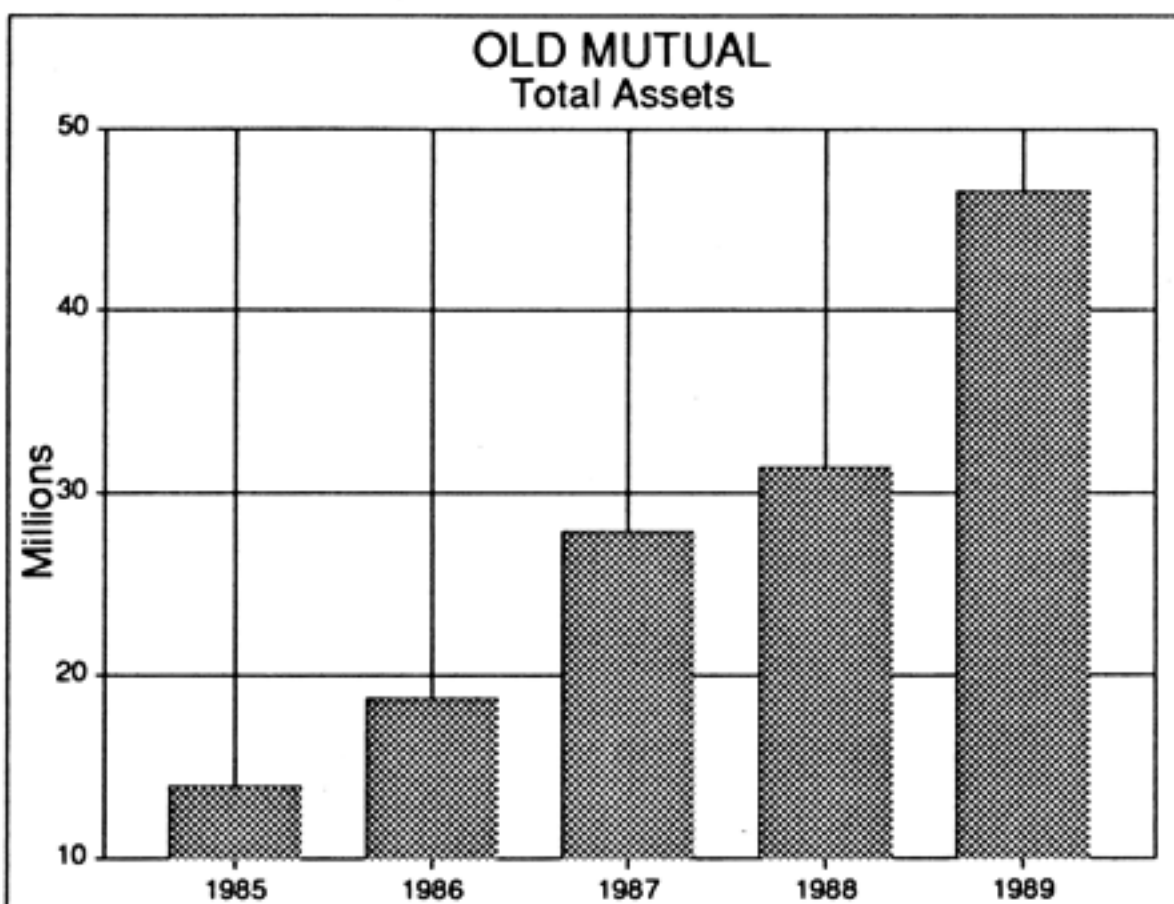
The "man in the street" policyholder owns Old Mutual, but certainly has a little say over how it's money is used. It is impossible for the policyholder to influence group policies because the identity of individual policyholders is kept very secret. It is really the small group of directors, comprising some of the most powerful business leaders in South Africa, which controls Old Mutual.

Cash is flowing into Old Mutual but very little is going out to its workers. In the year ended 30 June 1989, income rose by 25% to R8,429 million per working day.

Giant shares

A recent *Business Day* article reports that shares owned by the Old Mutual increased in value by more than three quarters (75%) to R35 billion during 1989.

Old Mutual shareholding include a 35% share of Barlow Rand and 51% of Nedbank. It



also has a large share in Anglo American, De Beers, Rembrandt and Sasol.

No profits to workers

The large profits made by Old Mutual certainly do not flow to workers. Cleaners who are located in the lowest grade are paid only R694 per month. Although this is above the AWARD average for cleaners of R594 per month, it is well below rates paid at 39 companies surveyed by AWARD.

The cleaners' wage paid by Old Mutual is also lower than the SLL poverty datum line of R724,42 per month. Workers report that a growing trend in Old Mutual is that of subcontracting, particularly in cleaning and security.

The threat of subcontracting is used by Old Mutual management as a counter to demands for higher wages. The workers most likely to be affected are those in the lower grades, like cleaners. ☆

Inflation

Consumer Price Index
(1985=100)

Annual rate of inflation
(% increase over 1 year)

Area	Feb 1990	Feb 89 - Feb 90
Cape Town	191,6	14,1%
Port Elizabeth	195,5	13,7%
East London	189,9	15,6%
Durban	185,8	16,0%
Pietermaritzburg	190,0	15,5%
Witwatersrand	194,8	15,3%
Vaal Triangle	191,1	15,6%
Pretoria	202,4	14,2%
Klerksdorp	203,2	14,7%
Bloemfontein	177,0	13,1%
OFS Goldfields	193,5	15,0%
Kimberley	185,8	14,1%
South Africa	193,3	14,9%

Source: Central Statistical Service

Correction

With respect to our article on the Living Wage Campaign in our last edition, we would like to publish the following:

1. The Labour Research Service points out that it has never claimed that "a figure in the region of R700 would be quite affordable to all companies" (in respect of a national minimum wage), as stated on page 22 of Labour Bulletin Vol 14 No 7. The most they would claim is that R700 is a credible demand.

2. On page 23, the Y-axis of the top graph is not "rands per week", but "percentage change".

Labour Research Service has vacancy for a researcher

One of our research staff has left to head a new research unit in Johannesburg. We are now looking for someone to fill her place at our offices in Cape Town.

Our work consists of reports on wage bargaining issues commissioned by progressive trade unions. To this end, we maintain a large database of wage agreements. The successful applicant is likely to have: research experience; a degree; an aptitude for figures; the ability to work as part of a team, and to be willing to develop an immense interest in wages. The acquisition of computer literacy will be required if not already held.

While the appointee will become a specialist in our field, he or she should also have a strong commitment to the trade union movement. This post includes responsibility for our training programme and for research reports for which a knowledge of job grading would have to be acquired.

The salary will depend on qualifications and proven research experience.

Applications for this post, containing detailed information about experience and qualifications, together with contactable references, should be made in writing to :
The Labour Research Service, P O Box 376, Salt River, 7925, before 25 May 1990.

Profile

RD: A tireless fighter for freedom

The RD NAIDOO MEMORIAL COMMITTEE pays tribute to RD Naidoo who died while addressing students at the University of Durban Westville on 26 April 1990.

When Ramsamy Dorasamy Naidoo got up to speak at UDW on the subject he committed his whole life to - the workers' struggle - he received a standing ovation. The students were acknowledging a revolutionary and political leader whose contribution to the liberation movement spanned seven decades, and who suffered greatly at the hands of the State.

A few minutes later he collapsed and died in the midst of shocked students at UDW. The crowd rose to salute and celebrate the life of a valiant soldier of the South African revolution. They sang the national anthem with such poignancy that many broke into tears.

Seventy-six year old RD died the way he lived - fighting the apartheid state.

The students learnt about courage and sacrifice from a man who started work as a humble worker in the baking industry.

To the last second of a full and selfless life, R.D. remained a vibrant and committed revolutionary. He selflessly served the people and their interest, showing a deep respect for young and old, men and women, quietly inspiring activists both in the heat of battle and in periods of despondency.

R.D. always maintained an excellence sense of humour, even under trying circumstances. He was always patient, carefully explaining his view, and when roused would capture his audience with magical and militant oratory.

A man of action

For R.D. every aspect of the South African society provided an avenue to mobilise people and raise their political

conscience. His organisation involvement ranged from the Child Welfare Society to the South African Communist Party (SACP).

South African Communist Party

R.D. used every opportunity to publicise his membership of the SACP. The state responded by serving a banning order on him in the early 50's and charging him with advocating communism in the 70's. For this he received a three year suspended sentence. R.D.'s membership dates as far back as 1938. After the party was banned, he became a member of the underground and remained a member until his death. His views on the SACP and the principles of Marxism-Leninism received worldwide publicity in a video made with Joe Slovo called "Ama Khomanisi".

He firmly believed in the triumph of socialism, and regarded the upheavals in the Eastern bloc as nothing more than necessary adjustments for the further advancement of socialism. He attacked any bureaucracy which alienated itself from the people, and said that it deserved the punishment that the people meted out to it.

Trade unions

R.D. began his lengthy involvement with trade unions in the Baking Worker's Industrial Union. As unions began to expand during the war years, R.D. began to play a central role in organising the Brick and Tile, Rubber, Tin & Biscuits industries as well as railway and municipal workers. Often R.D. found himself at the centre of strikes - especially in the famous Dunlop strike. R.D. earned the respect of the workers

for his fearless and total support. Until its merger with NUMSA, R.D. worked closely with the Tin Workers Union and assisted many COSATU unions.

During the early fifties R.D. spent 18 months in India and a few months in Ceylon. The trip was no holiday for R.D. True to his internationalist leanings he became involved in the Dock Worker's Union of India. The Indian government barred him from promoting the union and he moved to Ceylon. There he helped organise the Labourers Union. Harassed by the authorities, he lived clandestinely in the worker's quarters and continued organising.

UDF and NIC

A long-standing member of the Natal Indian Congress, RD represented the organisation at the founding conference of the UDF in 1983. He told the Cape Town conference that:

"Freedom can only be achieved when the ownership of the means of production is transferred to the working class.". His militant arousing speech galvanised the delegates into a thunderous ovation, and was quoted from platforms throughout the country.

Sport

R.D. was involved in various codes of sports both at a local and national level. He served as the National Secretary of the South African Bodybuilding and Weightlifting Association and represented the organisation at SACOS.

More recently he was involved in the development of National Sports Congress (NSC) structures. He saw the NSC as a crucial weapon in breaking down apartheid barriers and building non-racialism in sport.

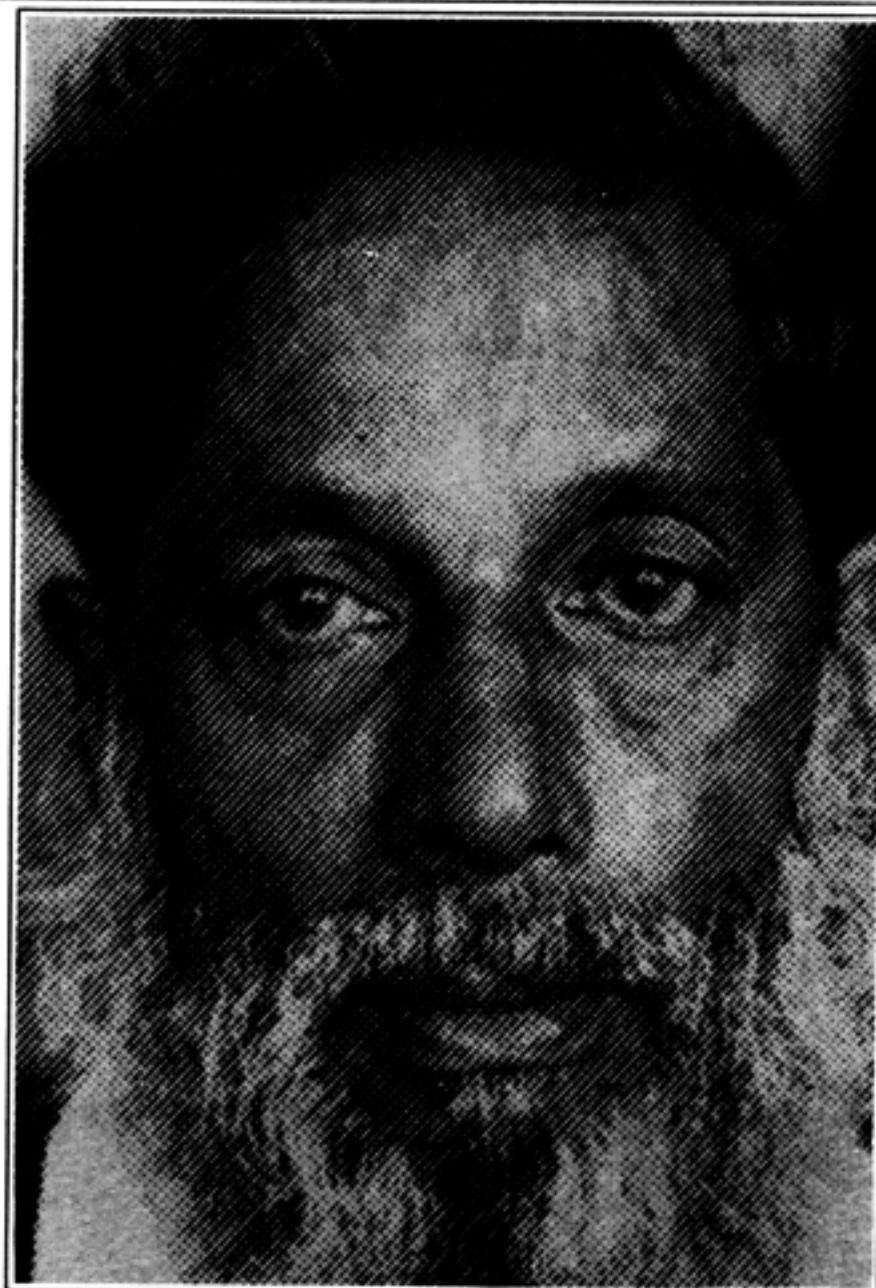
Civic

R.D. was immensely popular in his immediate community because of his deep commitment to building civic organisations. He was the chairperson of the Asherville Housing Action Committee (ASHAC), an affiliate of the Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC). In a rent struggle led by DHAC, R.D. fasted for a week in protest against rent increases. His courageous action focused attention on the struggle and greatly increased support for the campaign.

Lessons for posterity

There are few persons in our struggle who have contributed to so many different fields of activity. Many generations of freedom fighters and socialists will be guided and inspired by the lessons of R.D.'s life:

- ★ His unwavering commitment to the superiority of socialism over capitalism. He also believed that socialism will survive its present crisis and emerge as a more just, humane and productive



R.D.'s Credo

"Man's dearest possession is his life, and since it is given to him to live but once, he must so live as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose, so live so as not to be seared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past, so live that, dying, he can say: All my life and all my strength was given to the finest cause in the world - the liberation of mankind".

V.I. Lenin

system.

- ★ His profound belief in and practice of democracy - as an ideal to struggle for, a guide to daily practice in organisation, a way of life and conduct to all human beings - treating all as equals.
- ★ His adherence to non-racialism
- ★ His humility and willingness to contribute to all organisational tasks - whether it was sitting on a platform or distributing pamphlets.
- ★ His loyalty to the cause of the working class. He believed that only it could be relied upon to fight until all political, social and economic injustices are eliminated.
- ★ His personal and political discipline, his accountability to organisations, his ability to work collectively.

Comrade RD was an example of the best in Marxism-Leninism. His ability to combine theory and practice, his combination of leader and activist and his unfailing ability to be constantly rooted among the oppressed masses of our country. ☆

