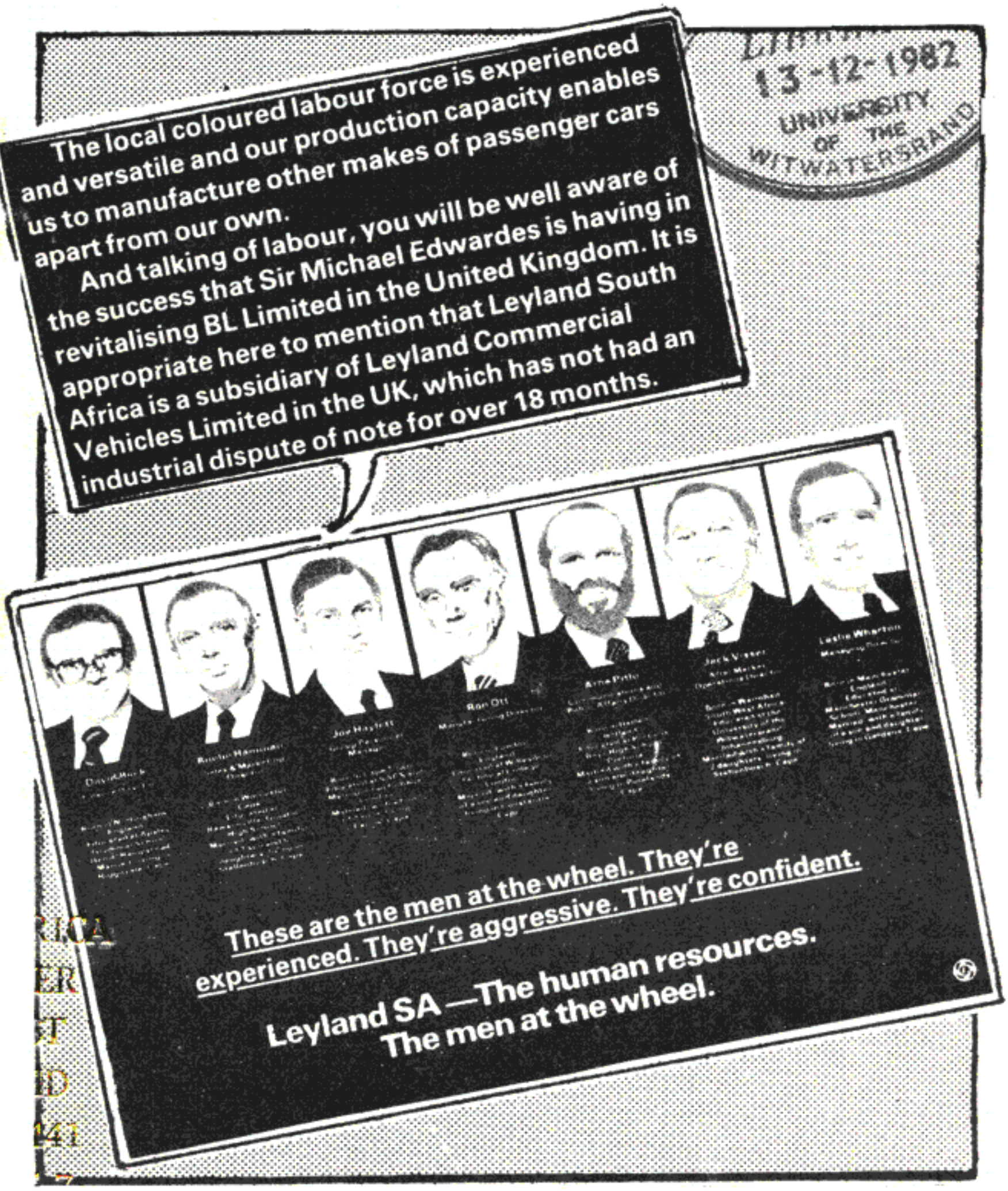
SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN



THE LEYLAND STRIKE!

NOVEMBER 1982 VOL. 8 No. 2

SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

Vol. 8 No. 2

NOVEMBER 1982

The South African Labour Bulletin
4 Central Court, P.O. Box 18109
125 Gale Street, Dalbridge
Durban 4001 Durban 4014

POST : ORGANISER / RESEARCHER

AFRA, the Association for Rural Advancement, based in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, is looking for a fulltime organiser/researcher, to start work in early 1983.

The aims of the Association have been defined broadly as:

a) to monitor, enquire into, record and publicise all matters relating to the social and economic position of persons in the rural areas of Natal with special regard to the effects of the policy of resettlement;

b) to take action and to encourage other persons and/or groups to take action to alleviate hardship, discrimination and oppression among such people.

The responsibilities of the person appointed to the advertised post will include the following:

- undertaking ongoing fieldwork/research into the issue of resettlement in Natal/KwaZulu;
- writing reports and factsheets dealing with the results of this work, for publication and dissemination;
- establishing and developing contact with communities affected by resettlement policies, where appropriate
- developing AFRA's usefulness as a resource organisation for communities affected by resettlement and for other outside groups engaged in similar or related work;
- administrative work in the AFRA office;

We are looking for somebody with initiative, maturity, and a commitment to rural development as well as having research and communication abilities. Previous experience in community/rural development work will be a recommendation. The job is based in Pietermaritzburg but involves travelling and so a driver's licence is essential.

Interested persons are asked to write to the AFRA Committee, PO Box 2517, Pietermaritzburg, 3200 by 30 November 1982, setting out their experience, qualifications, and interest in the job. More details about the job can be supplied on request by writing to the above address. Interviews with suitable applicants will be arranged thereafter.

ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT, PO Box 2517, Pietermaritzburg 3200

TELEPHONE (0331) 57607

Workers Axed

OVER the last year, as the South African economy has slipped deeper and deeper into recession, workers and their organisations have suffered a hard blow. Thousands of workers have been retrenched while employers and the state have used various heavy-handed tactics to break worker demands and weaken their organisation. Trade unions have to face the double task of protecting workers against retrenchment and also of maintaining and building existing organisation.

It is difficult to say precisely how many workers have already lost their jobs, as unorganised workers do not have the means to tell the public what is happening to them. What is known is that most companies in the mining and manufacturing industries have retrenched workers, or introduced cutbacks which also lower the living standard of workers.

- In the motor industry, where the demand for vehicles has been lower for most of this year, at least 2 000 workers were retrenched. Most motor companies also went onto a 3 or 4 day working week, for example, Sigma, Ford, Datsun-Nissan and CDA. Workers who still have jobs are losing part of their already meagre wages. If they do get paid for the working days, most of the money comes from funds of worker contributions, i.e. money which they have already worked for and did not get. At Sigma, for example, workers' money is deducted and placed in a "Supplementary Unemployment Fund" (SUF). Since Sigma went onto short-time at the end of July, workers have been paid 10% of their normal daily wage for the non-working day, and the money comes from the SUF.

- Workers in the metal and engineering industry have also carried the burden of the recession. Cutbacks in the mining industry, transport services and postal services directly affect the demand for products from the metal industry. More than 3 000 metal workers have already been retrenched, though it is hard to say precisely how many. Earlier this year, before retrenchments were widespread, management used cautious strategies e.g. provoking strikes. At Fenco (Brits) Flekser (Wadeville) and 3 East Rand Genrec subsidiaries they first retrenched a few workers which brought their fellow workers out on strike. Management then dismissed all the striking workers and re-employed selectively. Many did not get their jobs back. Management benefited in two ways:
  - they effectively retrenched workers without paying any retrenchment compensation

- they removed most of the organised workers.

Since then the unions have prepared their responses to possible retrenchment (see briefing below). Management has become fearless. At Salcast (Benoni) 600 workers (25% of the workforce) lost their jobs on one day, and several hundred workers were laid off during one week at Edward L. Bateman Engineering and Foundries Complex in Boksburg; during September CI Industries, a New Germany engineering company, retrenched 200 workers, and Barlows Communications another 382 workers. Ferralloys Ltd. an Anglo-Vaal company in Cato Ridge, recently retrenched approximately 200 workers. These are only a few of the companies that have retrenched workers from the metal industry.

● The drop in the gold price has had a direct effect on the mining industry and all those supplying it. Recent increases in the gold price have not made a significant difference to this situation. During this year many gold, diamond and coal mines have retrenched workers or closed down operations. Mining statistics show that about 15 000 workers have lost their jobs since March (Star 13.9.82). Gencor-owned Northfield Colliery in Glencoe, Natal, closed down after ISCOR stopped ordering their coking coal. ISCOR itself has retrenched about 2 000 workers during 1982, "because modernisation of machinery resulted in the closure of some plants".

● Hundreds of textile workers have lost their jobs during this year. In July management at Dano Textiles exploited a strike over recognition of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and the reinstatement of a fellow worker: 80 of the striking workers were retrenched. S.A. Fabrics retrenched 60 workers and gave the union only 36 hours notice, Veldsoun (Uitenhage), on two occasions retrenched workers, 600 in all, and used the resulting strike to dismiss a further 300 workers. Some companies in the Romatex group have gone onto short-time as a response to the recession.

● Although the building and construction industry is slower in showing the effects of recession, ILCO Homes employers warned that 2 500 workers could be jobless in the Durban area alone. TONCORO, which claims to be the biggest brick producer in the Western world, expects to lay off 700 workers in all. Corobrik has recently closed a plant. At the end of August 200 workers at Besterecta, a Cape Town construction company, were given a week's notice.

Thousands of black and white unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers, as well as white-collar workers, have been retrenched and squeezed in other sections of industry and commerce during this year. These cannot all be listed here, but it seems as if the situation is only getting worse, and the

majority of workers are threatened.

JHB. RESEARCHER, Oct. 10

Responses to Cutbacks

WHEN the manager of a large East Rand company was recently asked what he intended to do for 60 black workers facing retrenchment,he answered: "What do you expect? We can't do anything. If you think this is bad.... the avalanche is still coming!" Most of us are aware that the South African economy is in the thick of a recession, but each class carries a different burden, and perspectives vary greatly. The interests of the workers and employers are more polarised than ever: worker needs and demands increase (e.g. wages to meet rising prices, job security) and the employers hold a very strong weapon - the threat of unemployment when jobs are scarce.

For the employers the recession is a period to sit out between booms. It is a period of tightening up and maintaining a rate of profit. There are many strategies they can adopt, strategies learnt from previous slumps and perfected since. In fact the employers use the recession period as an opportunity to sack workers without really having to justify anything. It is a way of getting more production from a smaller number of workers, and a means of disorganising and disciplining organised workers. They can still afford to introduce new machinery (e.g. at ISCOR) to produce faster and cut labour costs. They can also cut down production and maintain profits by squeezing the workers, in various ways: thousands of workers lose their jobs, while others lose already meagre wages, overtime pay and bonuses which are crucial for their survival. In factories where workers are retrenched, the remaining workers are pushed to work harder and longer hours. Sometimes the jobs of retrenched workers have to be done by these workers, in addition to their own jobs. Workers are threatened with retrenchment if they resist and demand their rights.

In almost every company management complains that workers want higher wages without producing faster. If ever they need to justify pushing down real wages or retrenching workers, this is one of the reasons they give. On average, basic wages in manufacturing companies have not kept up with the increased cost of living, not to speak of other physical burdens workers must carry, yet employers expect workers to produce more in the same time.

For workers the recession is a threat to their survival and yet another burden over which they have little control. The employers and the state know

that the working class would have to be very well organised to resist the massive onslaught of the capitalist system. Those who have patiently organised to defend themselves and their class are constantly attacked. Employers and the state do not recognise the right to work. In many areas, union shop stewards and active members are the first to lose their jobs. With the new moves to cut contract workers off from all available industrial employment, control their movements and isolate them in the bantustans, as well as to provide funds for non-striking workers and scab workers, the state perfects its techniques of dividing workers and weakening their organisations.

The progressive trade union movement emerged and developed during a period of relative economic stability. On the whole they predicted a recession and did what they could to prepare in terms of consolidating organisation. During 1982 they had to develop strategies to deal with, amongst other things, the threat of massive retrenchments. They know, however, that at this point in time organisation is not strong enough to really resist lay-offs; further, it is only in a different kind of society that the workers can really be protected against retrenchments; a society

> "where booms and recessions will not exist; where factories will not be slack because workers will have money to buy the things produced; where the goods produced will be things that workers need; and where workers will have shorter working hours and have time to spend a their leisure". (General Workers Union in KWASA Aug. 1982).

But this is a long way off and unions must respond to immediate problems.

Metal workers were the first to be hit by massive retrenchments. MAWU saw that the motto of the metal-employers was "cut workers, not profits" during recession, and demanded that companies use short-time rather than retrenchments to cut costs. MAWU also negotiated a retrenchment procedure with management, whereby

- workers with longest service should be retrenched last
- workers should be given 3 months warning of retrenchments, and the opportunity to negotiate
- retrenched workers must fill the first vacancies
- workers must receive severance / redundancy pay according to the number of years spent with the company.

Companies have responded differently to these conditions. Barlows managers were in principle prepared to retrench only those workers who were prepared to leave, as well as to pay a lump sum of about 3 months' wages.

Other employers simply disregard these demands.

Metal workers in skilled and semi-skilled positions, most of whom are members of the reactionary S.A. Boilermakers Society, have found that their union offers them no protection when they are retrenched. The union claims to find them new jobs, but the workers say this is not true. The metal companies do not pay unemployment benefits to higher categories of workers; also many earned too much (over R1 000) to qualify for government UIF benefits, and they cannot draw on their company pension provident funds before retirement age. These workers are left without resources when they are retrenched and their union dismisses their demands.

At CUSA's national conference in August, unions committed themselves to fighting retrenchment and protecting jobless workers. They demanded that rather than retrenching, companies should

- cut back on casual workers
- withdraw contracts given to other companies
- suspend overtime and recruitments
- reduce the budget
- redeploy workers
- plan early retirement of pensionable personnel with full benefits
- introduce work-sharing schemes and short-time.

Everything should be done to cut costs before dismissing workers. If retrenchments "must" happen, maximum periods of notice must be given, and worker-management committees must select the workers. The first workers to leave should be

- those on early retirement and those over 65
- those who are willing to leave
- part-time workers
- those on short - rather than long service.

Special protection must be given to contract workers. CUSA unions will also press for alternative work, adequate redundancy pay and a guarantee that they will be considered first for re-employment. (Resolutions adopted at Annual Conference August 1982).

Workers in the GWU discussed alternatives to retrenchment, (see Document section) and also found that a ban on overtime and the use of short-time were the first two alternatives to demand. A third alternative which the workers in the Stevedoring Industry and in Dorman Long, an engineering firm, have thought of is unpaid leave. About 200 workers from Dorman Long avoided retrenchment in August by all taking 3 months' unpaid leave in cycles over a

period of about 2 years. A similar show of unity between organised worker was the decision by 14 Trident Marine workers with urban rights, to give up their jobs in order to protect contract workers who faced isolation in th bantustans if they lost their jobs. These 2 concrete actions by GWU workers (see briefing below) show that united worker action can prevent arbitrary retrenchments or lessen the burden that workers are forced to carry.

JHB. RESEARCHER, Oct. 10

Unity in Hardship

AS the recession worsens and the threat of retrenchment becomes increasingly severe, workers - particularly organised workers - are finding their strength sorely tested.

But workers in two engineering firms in Cape Town hit by retrenchment recently have managed not only to sustain organisation, but also to make an impressive stand of solidarity involving considerable sacrifices to protect each other from the hardships of unemployment.

When retrenchments were threatened at Trident Marine Engineering in July, 11 workers with rights to remain permanently in Cape Town volunteered to be laid off to protect migrant workers from having to return to the homelands where the prospects of employment are virtually non-existent.

The workers, all members of the General Workers' Union (GWU), decided at a general meeting that those with Section 10 rights would be the first to go.

In terms of an agreement with the employers, the GWU and the workers committee negotiated retrenchment procedure and the workers were informed the decision to retrench in advance.

In a statement released to the press, the union said it was proud of the stand made by the Trident workers. 'It is an example of the unity between migrants and Section 10 workers in our union.'

Less than a month later at Dorman Long Swan Hunter, 200 GWU member decided to take three months' unpaid leave in cycles over two years to prevent 40 workers being retrenched.

During negotiations with management over retrenchment procedure, the workers proposed that they all take long leave.

A GWU spokesperson said it was a great sacrifice for workers to be our of employment for three months. 'But they decided it was better for all of them to suffer some hardship than for some of them to suffer extreme

hardship',she said.

The union said it was a real show of unity between organised workers and demonstrated the extent to which they were prepared to stand together to protect each other.

C.T. CORRESPONDENT, Sept 6

Shopworkers on the Move

LARGE scale worker action taken by shopworkers recently over poor wages and working conditions has resulted in significant advances for many groups of shopworkers all over South Africa.

A recognition agreement has recently been signed and two recognition agreements are in the process of being negotiated. These agreements involve wage negotiations, shop steward recognition, union access, grievance and retrenchment procedures, amongst other subjects.

The recently signed agreement was formed between CCAWUSA and the Edgars group of stores. This covers CCAWUSA members at all Edgars, Jet, Sales House and Ackermans stores in South Africa.

The recognition agreements that are presently being negotiated are between CCAWUSA and O.K. Bazaars and between CCAWUSA and Woolworths nationwide and affect all CCAWUSA members there.

In all cases strikes involving entire workforces occurred at warehouses in Johannesburg, closing down the warehouses. Worker grievances centred around low wages and non-recognition of their union and shop stewards. At O.K. Bazaars, for example, over 700 workers struck at 3 warehouses.

The strikes then spread to the stores due to management's hardline attitude towards the striking workers. At O.K. Bazaars, for example, workers at 12 stores in Johannesburg joined the strike in support of the warehouse workers and workers in O.K. stores all over Natal threatened to strike if the issue was not resolved to their satisfaction.

All the strikes ended successfully without any workers losing their jobs. Apart from recognition talks being initiated, O.K. agreed to negotiate the workers' wage demands and signed a statement recognising shop stewards in principle, and Woolworths workers achieved an increase of R40.00 per month or 12½% of their current salaries, whichever is the greater. Edgars workers have achieved a full recognition agreement and wage increases.

CCAWUSA, Dbn, Oct. 7

briefings

Teba 463

PENALTY FORM 463 is one of the key methods used by the mining industry to blacklist 'undesirable' workers. A number of these forms recently obtained make illuminating and unpleasant reading. Printed on standard blue paper and headed UNDESIRABLE, form Teba 463 lists the personal details of the worker, the reasons for his dismissal and the penalty imposed on him.

Reasons for dismissal vary enormously:

- 'Allowed a non-employee to sleep in his room who is suspected of theft'
- 'Continuously absent'
- 'Caught with 26 bottles Mainstay and 6 cans of Beer, smuggling them into hostel'
- 'Refuses to work where told'
- 'Loafed'
- 'Took part in 1 day strike'

For these and other 'crimes' a penalty is imposed on the worker. He can be blacklisted from a specific mine, a particular mining group, mines in a specified area and/or from the mining industry as a whole. The penalty can be imposed for lengths of time ranging from 3 months to 60 months.... or indefinitely! On none of the forms examined was anything less than indefinite blacklisting from a particular mine given.

For example:

- Mr. X's firing was caused by 'entering the hostel at 10.05 pm' and because, 2 months later, he 'took part in a 1 day strike'. The form indicates 'fired and blacklist', and the penalty handed out prevents him from working at Winkelhaak mine, or in the Evander area, or for the Union Corporation group 'indefinitely'. He was also blacklisted from the entire mining industry for 6 months.
- Mr. Y. allegedly 'refused to complete contract'. He was excluded indefinitely from Leslie gold mine and given a 12-month suspension from the mining industry.
- Mr. Z. who allegedly 'loafed' on 6 occasions last year, was indefinitely suspended from Durban Roodepoort Deep and blacklisted by the industry for 12 months.

With the high levels of unemployment in the rural areas, the chances of finding other jobs are slender.

Form 463 is only a part of the whole mining recruitment system. How

does it work? Workers for gold and other mines are recruited by TEBA (Employment Bureau of Africa), a continuation of the old Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) and Wenela. Operating throughout Southern Africa it has almost 200 offices in cities, towns and villages, which channel roughly half a million workers annually to the mines. Under the control of the Chamber of Mines, Teba is the sole supplier of labour to most of the mining industry and is therefore in a monopolistic position. Apart from administrative functions (such as the payment of remittances, informing relatives when a miner is killed, etc.), Teba ensures that the mines get sufficient labour, and it controls who is recruited.

A particular Teba Office will be informed that a mine needs it to recruit, for example, 4 winch operators. The Teba officials will then choose from those men waiting at the gate - prospective workers can spend weeks and even months sitting outside the offices. Those chosen have their records checked to see if they are 'suitable'. Every worker has a separate employment record card which is kept in the office and which lists the penalties prescribed by form 463. This is the stage at which 'undesirable' workers are excluded. Once workers are selected contracts are signed and attested at the local Labour Bureau. Teba pays a R2 attestation fee 'per head'. The workers are then transported to the mines.

It is impossible for workers to circumvent this system. A worker who tries to get recruited at another Teba office where he has no record card, will find that office contacting his home office for the details. Using travel documents, ID books or passes, various checks are made.

In addition to the blacklist, another form of control is the VRG - Valid Re-engagement Guarantee. The system was introduced in an attempt to 'stabilise' labour on the mines. A worker with a VRG, who returns by a specified date, gets his job back and often receives a cash payment (or 'bonus'). The overwhelming majority of recruits at present are those with VRGs. But the trouble with the system, for the workers, is that the VRG is not automatically given at the end of a contract. Like the 'call-in card' system in industry, it is only given to those workers whom management feels have a satisfactory record. Without a VRG the worker will battle to get re-recruited. In effect, according to one official, the VRG system is also a blacklist system.

It is the Liaison Division of Teba which administers the penalty forms. A senior member of that division denied that it was called 'blacklisting', and felt that the penalties and the system were 'not draconian'. The system is

only used, according to him, 'if someone decides not to work or in management decide he's not the right material'. Furthermore, the penalties can apparently be reviewed if the worker makes a representation, usually to the local Teba office. How easy it is for Mr. X in the Lusikisiki area to do this is unclear.

An indication that workers see the system as acting against them is the fact that mine riots have often included deliberate destruction of mine records. At Kloof mine, following the unrest in July this year, about 2 000 dismissed / departing men were interviewed by the liaison division and produced their own records. This was to enable the division to keep a record of who was leaving. Whether the workers voluntarily took part in this process (which would lead to their blacklisting) is not clear. At Buffelsfontein mine (also involved in the unrest) dismissed workers were held under armed guard for a few days whilst they were being processed out.

Teba certainly moved fast in the wake of the massive upheavals in July A letter dated July 5 stated that penalty forms 463 were being sent out, and in the interim Teba offices should not re-engage anyone discharged through disturbances at Stilfontein, Buffelsfontein, West Driefontein, East Driefontein, Grootvlei, Bafokeng North, Bafokeng South, Wildebeestfontein North, and Wildebeestfontein South. A further letter dated July 8 withdrew this indefinite penalty from the mining industry as a whole and replaced it with an indefinite penalty preventing all dismissed workers from getting work at all General Mining Union Corporation mines (including the Impala platinum mines).

In June 1981, RS Lawrence, delivering his presidential address to the AGM of the Chamber of Mines, said that: "The success of the South Africa mining industry owes much to the free enterprise system and the willingness of the authorities to encourage and support this system... It will be the responsibility of government to see that the basic requirements of a free market system continue to exist and indeed, are expanded. This will be particularly important in those areas affecting the mobility of labour of restricting the ability of individuals to enjoy the fruits of their labour".

How does the Chamber reconcile this ideology with its own blacklisting practices?

J. BASKIN, Jhb, Sept 6

Tired of Ploughing for Nothing

AN average salary of R50,30 per month for farm workers in the Hluhluwe/Mtubatuba area of Natal was revealed in a survey carried out by the Centre for Research and Documentation of the University of Zululand. This average is possibly a slightly high representation of the true state of affairs as it included supervisors who were earning around R100 per month. In fact 69% of workers interviewed were earning less than R50 p.m. with 26% earning under R30 p.m.

The area in which the survey was conducted is on the edge of the Natal sugar belt with the result that just over half the number of respondents came from sugar farms with the rest being employed on timber, pineapple, cattle and vegetable farms. Salaries did not vary much according to the type of farm, apart from timber cutters who were linked to a pulp mill and were earning R100 p.m.

Virtually all workers were receiving rations on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis. Some farmers attempt to justify the payment of low salaries by the fact that rations are issued to workers. The average value of rations received however, R16 per month, does not substantiate this claim and rations should be seen as no more than a fringe benefit.

When asked what aspect of their conditions of service most required improvement, 83% of workers mentioned salaries as a first priority. Although rations were rated second there were a number of workers who stated that they would prefer cash to rations. "We will not worry ourselves about rations provided there is an increase in our salary because things are so expensive".

Not only are workers asking for higher salaries because they need the money but also because they feel the work they do is genuinely worth more. As one worker stated. "The salary should be equivalent to the work concerned".

Daily commuters are the predominant form of labour in this area with farmers sending trucks and tractors with trailers into the adjacent Mpukunyoni reserve in the early morning to collect workers and then returning them in the evenings.

This system allows farmers to employ workers without the responsibility of housing them or their families. The KwaZulu jigsaw provides the opportunity for this sort of relationship to develop in vast areas of the Natal Coastal belt.

briefings

The commuter system leads to many farmers and large farming companies classifying these workers as 'casuals' with consequently lower salaries and smaller fringe benefits than 'permanent' workers. All of the 120 workers interviewed, however, saw themselves as 'permanent' in that they worked on farms throughout the year. For most this means a 6-day week for 12 months on end as only 25% were entitled to paid leave.

When asked why they worked on the white farms rather than cultivate their own land allocations in the reserve, most respondents indicated that they really had no alternative. 38% said they did not have enough land or finance, 31% that they were poverty stricken and desperate for a cash income, and 15% said that they saw no potential for making a living from their own land. "I do have land but I'm tired of ploughing and reaping nothing".

At a meeting of farm workers in the Mfekayi area near Mtubatuba held on Sept 19 1982 the following demands were raised and passed as resolutions by the workers to be presented to the National Manpower Commission.

- We do very strenuous work for long hours and consider it reasonable that we be guaranteed a minimum wage of R6 a day. This may appear to be a drastic demand when compared to our present earnings of between R1 and R3 per day but our living costs are no lower than those of other workers. We will even struggle to feed, clothe, house, and educate our families on R6 per day.
- We are workers in the same way as industrial workers and should get the same protection in legislation covering our working conditions. In particular we should have the right to paid leave and sick leave, to unemployment and pension benefits, and to a notice period or notice pay on termination of employment. All this should be contained in a contract with a copy of the contract being given to us by our employer.
- Legislation governing the employment and conditions of farm workers must not discriminate against those living in the reserves and travelling daily to work. We are all permanent workers and should have the same rights. Anyone who works for more than three consecutive months should have the rights of a permanent worker.
- It is only through an organised representative body that we will be able to negotiate without fear for reasonable working conditions. We therefore demand the right to organise ourselves with protection in legislation from victimisation.

P. DAPHNE, Kwa Dlangezwa, Sept 20

The Leyland Strike

Gavin Evans

On May 14, 1981, 2 000 workers at Leyland's Blackheath and Elsies River plants near Cape Town struck for higher wages. Eleven weeks later an agreement was reached between their union, the Western Cape Branch of the National Union of Motor Assembly Workers of South Africa (NUMARWOSA), now the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) and formerly the Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union (WPMAWU) and Leyland Management, and the 520 workers remaining on strike were reinstated.

This article focuses on the events of the strike and on the relationship between the union and the community organisations which supported it. This question has been raised in a number of strikes nationally in the last two years. In the Western Cape the two most notable were the Fattis and Monis and Meat Workers strikes. These differed significantly from the Leyland strike however. All but four of the striking workers were Coloured and there were many more involved than in previous strikes. Also, no product boycott was staged to engage community organisations' support and it was the first time that this union had experienced a strike.

Before examining the events of the strike itself it is useful to consider

some of the pertinent factors which affect shop floor and community organisation in the Western Cape. The fact that almost all the strikers were Coloured workers is particularly important. Like African workers they experience low wages and poor working conditions as well as the effects of racial segregation and political oppression. But they do not experience influx control and the migrant labour system which affect every aspect of many African workers' lives and structurally influence the content of their organisation and struggles.

As a Coloured Labour Preference area, employment opportunities for African workers are largely limited to areas where Coloured workers cannot be found such as construction, road work and stevedoring. There are few opportunities for upward mobility for African men, many of whom are migrants and there are virtually none for African women, most of whom are employed as domestic labourers. The Wiehahn and Riekert 'reforms' have not affected the Western Cape significantly. Restrictions on African trading means that the growth of an African traditional petty bourgeoisie has been slow. Futhermore the 99 year leasehold system does not apply in the Western Cape (although the Urban Foundation has negotiated a limited 60 year leasehold system in one area). Unlike Coloured workers, who have been widely dispersed by the Group Areas Act, African workers live in close proximity to each other in Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu - many of them as migrants in hostels. Many trade unionists find that because of this and the fact that their conditions are generally worse than other workers, the migrant workers are the most militant and easiest to organise.

The situation is very different for the coloured worker for a number of reasons. Their relative economic mobility and their greater political 'rights' have created more opprtunities for embourgeoisment at both an economic and ideological level. Furthermore, particularly amongst the lower strata of the working class, trade union and community organisations find that this is often expressed in racist attitudes towards African workers. But perhaps the greatest impediment to community and trade union organisation amongst the Coloured workers has been the Group Areas Act with its devastating effects in dividing communities. During the Leyland strike this was a particularly crucial factor as the workers were dispersed throughout the Western Cape - often as far as 100 km. from each other.

Equally important is the history of organisation of the working class in the Western Cape. After the state crackdown on SACTU in the early '60s, legal organisation of African workers virtually disappeared until the re-emergence

of the African Food and Canning Workers Union and the formation of the Western Province General Workers Union in the '70s. Nevertheless something of a legacy remains and some of the workers and organisers involved in African trade unions today are people wiith some background in the trade unions and political movements of the '50s. Amongst the majority of African workers the organisers find some understanding of the need for active participation in the unions and respect for those politically involved. Amongst the Coloured workers (and particularly the Coloured men who seem to be the most difficult to organise) this is usually not the case. From the foundation of the African Peoples Organisation (APO) in 1902 until the 1976/7 uprising, political debate which has existed has often tended to centre around the question of participation or non-participation in government institutions. Thus since the founding of anti-CAD in 1943 until the '70s non-reformist politics has been dominated by boycottist positions while, more recently the only other alternative offered was the politics of the CPRC (Coloured Peoples Representative Council).

This situation has been even more serious as far as factory floor organisation is concerned. Again, the history of economistic unions originates in the craft unions formed at the beginning of the century while the legacy of the TUCSA unions has played a significant disorganising role. At the moment the largest union in the Western Cape is the Garment Workers Union. This sort of conservative organisation, with strong bureaucratic overtones, has led workers to the false perception of trade unions as hierarchical institutions governed by their officialdom and thus beyond the control of the workers themselves. Often, even those workers who advocate 'strong unions' interpret the strength of a union in terms of its ability to enforce discipline in a factory through the application of legal instruments.

This is particularly true of the response of the skilled workers. As one trade unionist put it: 'The skilled workers just aren't keen and they often see themselves as being closer to management than to the rest of the workers. They also get many benefits such as pensions, medical funds, higher wages, better working conditions, separate toilet facilities and so on. Often they feel they can go it alone and that they don't need the union or they think of the union as a charity organisation or death benefit society'.(1)

Over the last five years this situation has started to change. The growth of the Black Consciousness movement played an important role in politicising Coloured as well as African students. Since the 1976/7 uprising community organisation has grown rapidly, particularly in the Coloured areas where

youth groups, womens organisations, SRCs and civic groups have emerged and have had a pervasive influence on the communities. In 1981, for example, there were a number of campaigns culminating in CAHAC (The Cape Areas Housing Action Committee) to resist the council's rent increases. Grassroots Newspaper has played an invaluable role in raising awareness and co-ordinating action in 1980. There was evidence of heightened political consciousness through mass participation in the schools, bus and meat boycotts and popular organisations such as the Committee of 81 expanded dramatically and involved thousands of people in struggle. In 1981 community organisations concentrated on consolidating their existing membership rather than going on membership drives, and this had the partial effect of limiting support for the Wilson Rowntree and Leyland strikes so that they never reached the level of the meat strike.

There has also been a growth in the organisation of Coloured workers by progressive trade unions and there are now a number of unions which have some level of shop floor democracy and which have been active in regional and national campaigns involving Coloured workers.(2) The Leyland strike should be seen in the context of this embryonic growth and was an indication both of the growing militancy of the workers as well as the uneven development of this process.

Had it not been for the extremely heavy handed and intransigent attitude of Leyland management the strike might not have occurred. Leyland (S.A.) is a subsidiary of Leyland Commercial Vehicles Ltd in the UK which since 1975 has been publicly owned with a 96,6% of the equity being vested in the British Secretary of State for Industry,(3) although full control is in the hands of its Board of Directors headed by South African born Sir Michael Edwardes, who consistently lives up to his reputation for ruthless handling of British workers. As a Leyland (S.A.) publicity pamphlet put it in May 1981: 'And talking of labour you will be well aware of the success that Sir Michael Edwardes is having revitalising B.L. (Ltd) in the United Kingdom, which has not had an industrial dispute of note for over 18 months'.(4) Two months later a national strike at Leyland came close to permanently closing the company down. In South Africa, labour policy is more or less in the hands of local management but their attitude is not less reactionary than that of their parent company. For one thing, they are not known for their regard for labour codes.(5) According to the EEC Code of Conduct, British companies should pay 50% more than the household subsistence level, which in Cape Town would have meant at least R1,67 an hour in December 1980. At that time

the lowest wage was R1,30 an hour, (6) but according to management the reason why wages are the lowest in the motor industry in the country is that the 'going rate' here is lower than elsewhere: 'The choice is always the individual's, you get many people who would like to come to Cape Town from Durban, Johannesburg, or Pretoria and they know that the rates are lower here. To what extent they're prepared to drop depends on the individual'.(7) This was the issue the strike was fought over.

Leyland (S.A.) now employs 2 200 workers at its two plants (1 700 at Blackheath and 500 at Elsies River). The Blackheath plant was established in 1955 and the Elsies River plant was taken over on lease from Chrysler in 1972. Over the next three years Leyland and Sigma will be co-operating in a R75 million (initial expenditure) expansion plan in which Sigma will take over the Blackheath plant.(8) This new development will be of considerable significance to the Western Cape which has relatively little industry of this nature, and will create 1 500 new jobs. (At the moment the only other plant is the Atlantis Diesel Engine (ADE) plant which employs 2 500 workers). Sigma's investment (which over the next three years will total R380 million) will be concentrated in light commercial vehicles while Leyland plans to build a new car for Renault at the Elsies River plant.(9) The plans at Blackheath and Elsies River will make Leyland the single largest private employer in the Western Cape. Their annual wage bill is over R10 million and a further R30 million p.a. is distributed among supply industries.

Sigma's move (their managing director, Mr. Fred Butler, said they were originally 'half-heartedly flirting with Fiat') (10) seems to have been prompted by the low wages in the industry and the consequently high profits, as well as by the higher risk of strikes in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape. Butler stated that if another plant had been erected at Sigma Park in the Transvaal a total strike in this region would have affected the total production of commercial vehicles.(11)

In 1980 management claimed that its financial position was bad and that they had been told by Edwardes that he would close down the plant unless it showed an increased profit. Since then, with the boom in the motor industry, Leyland's profits are reported to have increased considerably. Its turnover was R160 million in 1980 compared with R110 million in 1979. Its position in the market has also improved significantly with a 10,8% increase in truck sales, 17,5% increase in car sales, 16% increase in tractor sales, 9,4% increase in Land Rover sales and a 100% increase in bus sales.(12)

Almost the entire labour force is Coloured because of Cape Town's

reactionary response to it, it seems that the lessons have not yet been learned. In October 1980 the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers and the Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union (WPMAWU) and the United Automobile Workers Union amalgamated to form NUMARWOSA (later NAAWU) which now has 20 000 members and is affiliated to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). It is also affiliated to the International Metal Workers Federation. The Western Cape branch of NAAWU has existed for 27 years and its development from a conservative TUCSA union to one which is moving towards greater worker control and participation is important in understanding the strike.

According to workers and unionists involved prior to 1972 the union had been a 'management union' with which the workers had little interest. As Western Cape NAAWU President, Nathaniel Gantana put it: 'Over this period the union had a sad history because it had a sad executive. It was recognised by law and by the company but it didn't operate in the workers' interests - it was a sad story. The leaders were management guys - they didn't want to put up a hard fight. They were "yes sir" guys. For example, the shop stewards were senior blokes - inspectors and charge hands and the blue overall guys never qualified to be shop stewards'.(20) Prior to 1972 there was little communication from the leadership to the rank and file, there were no report backs, there was no worker education and consequently there was almost total apathy from the workers. They expected the leadership to do everything and the leadership did everything in their own interests and to feather their own nests.

In the late '60s signs of open dissatisfaction began to emerge and a group of workers began to meet with interested non-workers to plan to take over the union. They had regular Sunday meetings to which all interested workers were invited in which they explained to the workers the problems with the union, emphasising that the union belonged to them and not to the leadership. They also explained to the workers the irregularities such as the squandering of funds by the executive and the fact that the shop stewards were paid to attend meetings. They discussed the problems of other TUCSA unions in the Western Cape and elsewhere, and through these meetings an active group of workers concerned with changing the union emerged.(21) It was decided that it would be necessary to get rid of the entire leadership and this involved a protracted struggle of over three years. They began having regular house meetings in which they visited every worker in his house explaining issues and pointing out that they could make things better

if they decided they wanted to fight for it. And to gain support they capitalised on the irregularities, until 1971 when they had the support of the majority of the members.(22)

At the time the union secretary was Jack Heeger while Edgar Deane was the secretary of NUMARW to which WPMAWU was planning to affiliate. Deane, whom the workers distrusted and felt to be corrupt, announced his intention to retire in 1970. The position of National Secretary was offered to Heeger if WPMAWU affiliated to NUMARWOSA.(23) The union affiliated and this was used as an issue to fuel the workers' dissatisfaction. The workers then called a general meeting at Elsies River in which they passed a motion of no-confidence in the secretary and the entire executive; formed an interim committee until a new executive and representatives could be elected; and suspended the amalgamation to the National Union. However the matter was taken to court because the interim committee was found to have acted unconstitutionally. They continued to campaign for a further six months by canvassing from house to house, establishing small area groups and consolidating their support. As Gantana put it: 'There were years of "half-nag slaap en half-nag dink" and often we didn't even have time to eat'.(24)

The old union leadership went to great lengths to rid themselves of the action group. The present leadership alleges that management was asked to fire them, on the grounds of their being just a small group of agitators. However at this stage the new leadership had almost the entire shop floor behind them. At one election on March 25, 1972, the entire old executive was ousted and Joe Foster became the new general secretary and the union immediately disaffiliated from TUCSA. However they were all new to trade unionism and had no previous experience with administration and some of the old shop stewards began campaigning against them until their membership dropped to below 50% and they had yet again to campaign for the workers support. Management, it is claimed, tried to break the union by instituting 'Joint Consultative Committees', and introduced divisive techniques aimed at getting the higher paid workers to resign. At the time the union wrote to the workers maintaining that '... the company has become more verkramp... It is obvious that the company does not need nor do they want a trade union....'(25)

As the union gained support management was obliged to recognise them. Shop steward elections were held and an in-house agreement was reached. Previously the company would submit its proposals and they were invariably

accepted by the union executive most of whom were in the higher grades and thus would get increases of 5c or 6c an hour, for example, whereas the majority of the workers were in grades 1 or 2 and would be more likely to get increases of 1c or 2c. This changed and the union began to attempt to raise the wages of the lower grade workers.(26) Working conditions were also improved significantly and WPMAWU was one of the first registered unions to introduce into their in-house agreements disciplinary procedures, redundancy policy and bereavement leave.

Growing worker militancy and participation in the union's activities brought about these changes. All the workers' grievances were taken up and on every issue the workers were consulted. General meetings were well attended and the programme of visiting workers in the areas where they lived continued. On Sunday mornings, when general meetings were held, the unionists would visit each worker at his/her house to encourage him/her to attend the meetings. Through the general and house meetings and through the education of the shop stewards the union began to explain what the union was all about. "We told them what it meant to be a worker. We told them you're not just a machine - they are not doing you a favour by employing you - they need you to make their profits. And the blokes who were opposed started to join."(27)

Working conditions improved rapidly and the union claims that it has the most favourable in-house agreement in the Western Cape and that FOSATU uses it as a model. The workers are represented through their shop stewards (at the time of the strike there were 17 in the two factories) and through their executive who function as shop stewards. Unlike the situation with the UAW in Port Elizabeth, the shop stewards are not full time. In each division of the plant the workers elect one shop steward.(28) Despite the high level of militancy of the workers there appear to have been some problems recently in encouraging workers to stand as shop stewards. "You call for elections and no-one puts his name down, so you go and ask someone and he says no, and you try and persuade him and so on. And then when you get a new shop steward you have to train him. At the moment we have a whole lot of new shop stewards but we don't just tell them about the workers rights and legislation. We also educate them about the capitalist system and imperialism and what we are struggling for in South Africa....Workers control is a long and difficult process, you can't just walk in and have everyone participating. But that's what the struggle is all about".(29) Furthermore over the last few years workers have been increasingly dispersed through the implement-

ation of the Group Areas Act and transport fares have risen making it difficult for workers to attend general meetings.

Although wages did improve relative to those of other workers in the Western Cape, they didn't keep pace with those of motor workers in the rest of the country. In 1974 and 1976 when the union got conciliation board agreements the motor industry in the Western Cape was experiencing difficulties and since then wage increases have been slow. Another reason for this is the higher level of militancy shown by workers in the rest of the country until the Leyland strike. As Gantana put it: "One of the reasons they have higher wages is that the workers in the Eastern Cape for example are more politicised and more militant. They will even go on strike if their tea is too weak. The workers are more politically educated and more unionised. But people here are beginning to realise this, but sometimes there is still some sort of deadness amongst the workers. People still want to accept management's terms and some still think of the leadership as the organisation. But slowly there is a greater awareness and in the next two years the Western Cape will be very different. The strike helped definitely."(30) In this respect the strike should be seen as a culmination of a process of democratisation and worker education which had been occurring within the union for the previous 10 years.

The Western Cape branch of NAAWU has always been registered and this is not seen as being problematic. As union vice president Jack Dampies put it: "They (the African FCWU and the GWU) believe that if you register the government can control you and we don't agree with that because we have been registered all these years and there are ways of coming round it if you just want to look deeper into it."(31) They argue that they have never been bothered by the Labour Department and that all the Registrar wants are returns and membership lists and that the controls only exist on paper. One aspect of the union's argument stems from its perception of the weakness of the trade union movement nationally. As Foster puts it: "The point is this - we are not in a position of strength, let's face it. Look at the percentage of the labour force that is organised. I mean it's peanuts man. You can't fight the state and employers at the same time. We need to be strongly organised to fight the employers. Where's the strength to take on the state?...Once we're organised then we can say "get stuffed". People say we're organised when in fact we're weak".(32)

Since 1973 the union has been constantly submitting proposals for an industrial council to be established and it is likely that this will eventuate

within the next two years. They argue that with an in-house agreement the only recourse they have is through the courts whereas an industrial council agreement or a conciliation board agreement is legal and binding on both parties and any contraventions can be taken up through the Department of Manpower. They argue that when the union is representative of the workers and when the workers retain democratic control over negotiations, industrial councils can be made to work to the workers benefit. This is said to apply to the industrial councils such as that in the Motor Industry in Port Elizabeth rather then, for example, in the Iron and Steel Industry. On the question of industrial councils they recognise that it is the 'experts' who have to do the negotiating but don't see a problem of a mental/manual division of labour developing. As Foster expresses it: 'When we negotiate I accompany the worker representatives as an official of the union - but to pull in a bunch of shop stewards with the employers and say "Here you are now negotiate" - I mean how can it work? The bosses are experts while the workers haven't had much time to prepare and you expect them to know about the economy and the profits of the company and so on, and have an in depth argument with the employers'.(33) It remains to be seen whether participation on industrial councils will fulfil the union's expectations.

Relation between Shop Floor and Community Struggles

On the issue of relations between shop floor and community struggle the union, after a period of hesitation, welcomed community support and in its assessment of the strike it stressed the need for greater involvement with the community and for informing the community of what is taking place.(34) Before the strike the union had little direct contact with community organisations and activities. These contacts, and the perception of how necessary they are were developed through the process of struggle. The union encourages the workers to be active in community organisations but stresses that at no time should the union's actions be dominated by outside organisations. As Foster puts it: '...if one takes what happened to the Food and Canning Workers Union in Worcester where the Labour Party eventually took over the bloody struggle and here at Fattis and Monis where the union was prepared to reach an agreement with the company and Hassan Howa of SACOS said no... you reach that stage because the union allows the thing to get out of hand.'(35) Partly because of this reservation in the first two weeks of the strike there was considerable debate and discussion amongst the

union leadership whether and how community support should be sought and it was some time before much action was taken in this regard. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of sufficient previous contact with the community organisations and activists concerned. According to Foster: '.... there were so many organisations and I mean we didn't have a list. I mean some of these organisations, we never even knew of their existence. It is only now we know there are organisations like these which exist, that we could in future appeal to them.'(36) However, this is not to say the union had remained isolated from contact with struggles other than its own. It had for example, given active support during the Fattis and Monis and Meat workers strikes and had supported the 1976 and 1980 stay-aways. This relationship and contact was developed and built up by the strike and the union's attitude now is that if a similar situation should arise in the future the union should immediately contact the community organisations and the organisations should be willing to help as soon as possible. As the union vice-president put it: 'the community have given the workers a very, very great help. It only started a little late but there was really a great help and we believe that in future they will stand by the workers because they are all suffering under the present system in South Africa. So they have got to stand together to make it a new and better South Africa for all the workers'.(37)

However amongst the union leadership there is some suspicion of 'national' politics and a desire not to align the union in any way politically. Foster's attitude showed particular reservation on this issue: "So everybody gets the vote - so what's that going to change? Not a damn I mean Matanzima has proved this - look at Kenya for example - that in actual fact is not what we're striving for....We will stay out of politics until such time as there is a political party that we can align ourselves with....We don't mind being small and so on - as long as we keep on plugging our lines. I can't see that the national liberation movement is striving for the same type of society as us".(38) Nevertheless the union always emphasised that their struggle extended beyond the factory floor and in its worker education programmes it stressed the need to change South Africa as a whole. So despite the workers lack of exposure to community or national political issues they were not a-political in their attitude during the strike. As one community organiser active in the strike put it: "They didn't know the slogans, the amandlas and things like that - but the workers understood what it was about. The kinds of things the workers said and the way they understood that particular struggle showed quite a high degree of politicisation. I was

surprised man, workers went on stage during meetings and would take the mike and talk and they were saying fantastic things."(39)

Thus, as the union itself clearly recognises there were limits to the extent of active worker participation and to their understanding of the issues involved. Despite this there was a growing level of militancy which was fuelled by management's intransigent stance. Through the strike the militancy increased and their political understanding grew through the process of struggle. As Foster declared at the start of the strike: "The Leyland dispute is just a small skirmish in the main war in which workers in South Africa are involved...We are trying to politicise them and make them class-conscious. This is where the struggle lies."(40)

The Strike Begins

The Leyland strike should be seen in the context of worker action throughout the country at the time. In the previous one-and-a-half years the motor industry had been particularly affected. NUMARWOSA had issued a national demand for a minimum wage of R2,00 an hour (R368,00 per month) and although in May none of their branches had achieved this goal some important gains had been won and major strikes had taken place in the previous ten months.(41) In all cases management had agreed to negotiated settlements with the strikers and in most cases concessions had been made. Volkswagen, Ford and General Motors workers had been granted R1,60 an hour in January 1981, with a 20c an hour increase from July 1981 and were promised R2,00 an hour minimum by January 1982. This certainly had an influence on the Leyland workers. As Gantana put it: "In the Eastern Province there were ups and downs and people were reading about it in the paper. From June 1, 1980 we were officially in the National Union and people knew about the Volkswagen strike where they were going for R2,00 an hour. And with the price of bread rising the workers were getting angry."(42)

In December 1980 NUMARWOSA and Leyland (SA) entered into a new wage agreement in which the minimum wage was raised from R1,05 an hour to R1,30 an hour with a further 9c an hour coming into effect in July 1981. The wage increases were accepted by the union at a general meeting and on December 18, they signed the agreement. But, said Foster "before we put pen to paper I said to the managing director: "Look here mate, don't think that because we're signing here we are happy with what is written here. If things improve within the company we expect the company to do something", the man's words

to us, and there are witnesses to this, were "Look we appreciate it and will certainly remember it" .(43) The strategy of tying wage increases to the company's profits (which are undeclared) is open to question and there is no doubt that the union made a mistake in accepting a verbal agreement without getting it in writing. It was a gentleman's agreement and it's no use making a gentleman's agreement unless you're dealing with gentlemen as the union was to discover again with the July settlement.

During this period there were increases in the prices of sugar, bus fares, butter and train fares. There was considerable worker dissatisfaction over wages as well as over the amount of overtime they had to work. On January 23 1981 at Elsies River, the workers downed tools and marched to the offices. Management called the police and riot squad vans arrived carrying police armed with machine guns. Management rushed to the Elsies River plant and pleaded with the workers to return but the workers demanded a 17c increase. Management agreed to consider this and conditions immediately improved. Individual workers were given more money and overalls and foremen were told to treat the workers better.(44) Nevertheless general dissatisfaction grew and workers began to refuse to work overtime. A week before Easter, management put up a notice saying that the Thursday before Easter would be a normal working day whereas in previous years the workers had been paid the day before to give them money for the Easter weekend. However on this occasion workers were not paid and as a result the paintshop decided they would not work overtime and management closed the shop at 2 p.m. on the Thursday but threatened to take disciplinary action because these workers had previously agreed to work overtime. But after pressure management dropped the matter. After this other sections started refusing to work overtime and there were constant complaints about the wages and the executive and shop stewards were continually engaged in persuading workers to return to work. A meeting was held on May 3 to discuss the issue and the executive and General Secretary were mandated to approach management on the issue and they once again told management that the workers could not accommodate the increasing cost of living.(45)

They subsequently met with the personnel manager, Mr. Aubrey Haylett, and the production manager, Mr. Anderson, who agreed to consider the increase and take the issue to top management and to return with an answer in a week's time. The union then appealed to workers to continue working overtime so as not to prejudice their chances of getting an increase. On Wednesday 13 May, Foster received a call from Haylett asking him if he was

aware of strike action being taken to back up the claim for wages. At the Elsies River plant a notice had been put up saying: "Tomorrow is D Day Strike or Die". Foster, the executive and the shop stewards were called in but none of them knew anything about it, although they later discovered one of the workers had put it up as a joke. Although strike action had not been discussed by the workers, "they would not be intimidated by people threatening to take action like this". After this the workers in the engine plant downed tools.(46)

Foster then approached management to try and persuade them to back down: "Why don't you say to the workers "Look we are prepared to give you an increment on the condition that there's no trouble and say we'll give it to you from June 1 if there's no trouble, but if there is trouble we will withdraw it. You will be saving face and you will be accommodating the wishes of the workers".(47) Haylett took this suggestion to top level management who refused to consider it as they said they were not prepared to be intimidated by threats of industrial action. Leyland's Director of Public Affairs, Mr. Arnie Pitlo, then issued a statement saying: "The basis of the problem is that we have a request for wage increases over and above the increases contained in the December agreement."(47) A lunchtime meeting on the 14th followed and the executive explained the position to the workers who decided to down tools. The next day (Friday) management put up a notice saying that all workers were suspended for three days and they should report for duty on Wednedsay 20th May, failing which further disciplinary action would be taken. For the next three days workers clocked in but refused to work. On the Tuesday afternoon they held an illegal meeting in the bush outside, where the union explained to them that if they did not go back the next day they would be dismissed and that whatever decision they decided on must be taken together. Although the union leadership were opposed to going on strike the workers decided they were not going in. Two days earlier the company had stated that unless the workers returned they would declare a dispute and apply for the establishment of a conciliation board. Instead management met with the executive and General Secretary at D.F. Malan airport where they requested written demands for them to consider.(48)

On Wednesday the 20th, the workers met again and were informed that management would issue them with termination notices. Gantana spoke to the workers and told them that they should go back for their own good. But although a few workers indicated a desire to return to work, the majority refused until their demands were met. As one worker put it: "Nine cents can't

even buy a loaf of bread. The bosses eat our profit, they use our sweat and muscle - we will carry on striking until they give in."(49) The workers were then dismissed. The union claimed that this was done illegally because correct dismissal procedure had not been followed while management argued that the workers had dismissed themselves by going on an illegal strike. Production was brought to a halt and the workers issued the following demands:

- that all employees who were dismissed be unconditionally reinstated
- that no employee be victimised or intimidated for having taken part in the strike
- that an immediate 25c per hour be granted to all employees
- that negotiations with the union be started immediately with the aim of establishing a minimum wage of R2,00 per hour to come into effect by October.(50)

This resolution was subsequently passed onto management who did not respond but instead broke off all formal contact with the union. The workers were then issued with termination of service notices and given a week to return to work.(51)

The Union, the Community and the Strike

Leyland immediately began recruiting scabs and two weeks after the strike began they claimed that they had recruited 1 491 employees including 400 new employees and that they had restarted production in all departments and more than 250 vehicles had been built since the strike began.(52) But according to the union there had been no production at all in this period.(53) Both these claims appear to have been exaggerated. What is clear however, is that some workers did return in the first two weeks and that many new workers, mainly women, were recruited.(54) At the same time the company began a systematic programme of persuading striking workers to return to work. Workers were sent telegrams calling on them to return. Many skilled workers were collected at their homes by 'white shining Rovers' and pamphlets were distributed calling on them to return and calling for new workers.(55)

At the same time huge advertisements were placed in the newspapers calling for new workers. The press was used very effectively with management making sure that statements appeared daily while, especially in the crucial first two weeks, Foster and other union spokespersons were often not available for comment.(56) Three weeks after the strike began, when over

700 workers were still on strike, Leyland issued a press statement saying that production was now normal at both plants and that the company now employed 2 200 workers and that only 500 had refused to return to work.(57) At this stage the union claimed that only 250 had returned.(58) At the same time the company put 40 x 30 cm advertisements in the papers "thanking the community for its 'fantastic' support" of their advertisements.(59)

This advertisement appeared in the Weekend Argus 6.6.81

Other advertisements continued trying to recruit workers and advertisements on Radio Good Hope appealed for new workers.

Most workers stayed out until the end of June. One reason for them returning to work then was because the due date for their rent was coming up and many of them did not have the money to pay. But more importantly, there was very little real community support at this stage and although some regional committees had been formed, the workers had had little contact with the union outside of their weekly general meetings. Getting the workers together proved to be an enormous problem because, as a result of the implementation of the Group Areas Act, union members were scattered all over the Peninsula and the high cost of travelling without pay made it virtually impossible to get all members together at one central venue every day and it was therefore decided that meetings would be held in different residential areas. A series of meetings were held in areas where committees were elected to co-ordinate the activities of members in those particular areas. However, by the beginning of June most of these were not yet functioning properly and even when they were, they were no substitute for attending general meetings. The effects of the feelings of isolation and having to pay their rents without much money coming in yet (the union could not guarantee that it would pay people's rents) and this, combined with the feelings of despair from the negative press reports, advertisements, telegrams etc. took their toll. As one worker who went back at the end of the third week put it: "I mean people are not so much worried about furniture and things like that, but it's the rent that worries and the union can't say 'don't worry we'll pay your rent'...so you get a food parcel and you get R5 or R10. But that's not going to pay your rent - that just keeps you going. But when it comes to the end of the month you say where the hell am I going to get rent from...that's why I went back".(61)

Community support for the strike came from two areas - the regional committees and the community groups which gave support independently of, as well as through, the regional committees. As has been mentioned, the union had had little previous experience with community organisation and they waited two weeks before they started organising support, after which community activists began taking over this aspect of the strike support campaign. By the time this support got off the ground many workers had already returned. The regional or area committee were comprised of members of the communities as well as union members and their task was to discourage scabbing and generally to see to the welfare of the members by raising funds and getting donations from people in the community. Although these took about three weeks to be established they played a crucial role in keeping the

remaining workers out and in co-ordinating support. Area committees were set up in Strand, Macassar, Paarl, Belhar, Crawford and Bellville. At the meetings people from these communities volunteered to serve on the area committees and in some areas such as Mitchell's Plain, local civic groups such as the Electricity Petition Committee (EPC) adopted the workers. In Mitchell's Plain, Athlone, Paarl and Stellenbosch the area committees were able to get donations from local shops but in other areas such as Kleinvlei the committees consisted entirely of workers and there was no community involvement at all and funds had to be channelled from the union offices to the workers.(62)

Much seemed to depend on whether or not there were strong community groups and on how many workers there were in the various areas. For example in areas like Athlone where there were 16 workers, civic organisations were able to provide for the workers' needs whereas in Paarl there were 90 workers and this proved far more difficult. In most areas communication was good and the executive and General Secretary were able to visit them at least once a week, but in Athlone and Crawford there were tensions and communication broke down for a while.(63)

Direct support from community groups such as civics, sports clubs, youth groups, SRC's and churches began to emerge after about three weeks but it took another three weeks before the effects of this began to materialise. Part of the problem was the union's inexperience in this area but at the same time there was a reluctance amongst community activists to use the Leyland issue to mobilise support. The argument put forward was that community organisations were relatively weak and needed to consolidate their positions by focussing on their own issues and building up real organisations. Also a number of these organisations were involved (at least nominally) with the Wilson Rowntree Support Committee which did not transform itself into a workers support committee and only co-ordinated support for Leyland during the Leyland week at the end of June. There was no real effort to set up such a body. One meeting was held attended by over 100 people but after that there were no later meetings to provide backup. The lack of such a body made it difficult to co-ordinate community support.(64)

Another inhibiting factor was the lack of any concerted political activity over this period. Compared with the situation during the meat strike (where with the school and bus boycotts, the political climate was heightened) the political ethos in the communities was hardly explosive. Activities around Republic Day were quiet compared with those in other centres and the schools

boycott and June 16 commemoration faded. Furthermore, there was a general paranoia about security which further inhibited support. The community groups provided support mainly through distributing pamphlets, collecting food parcels and making public statements. For example the Western Province Council of Sport (WEPCOS) called on its affiliates to 'adopt' a worker for the duration of the strike, but the amount of support which materialised from them was limited. After the schools boycott was called off, the representative committee of the Western Cape pupils and students released a statement calling for the reinstatement of the striking workers but other than this there was little organised support from the schools.

The unions (the Food and Canning Workers Union, the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association, the National Union of Commercial Catering and Allied Workers, the Media Workers Association and the General Workers Union) also came out in support of the Leyland workers, releasing a joint statement on June 2.(65) The GWU, FCWU and CTMWA took up support in a more active way, speaking to their workers and offering speakers for Leyland meetings. The CTMWA for example, had Joe Foster to address all their shop stewards in every department about the strike. These unions also provided some financial assistance to the striking workers. However, offers of assistance were not always taken up by WPMAWU especially in the first two weeks and the lack of a support committee made it difficult for the unions to be more active in this respect. Another failure was the limited support from the white university community. They played a useful role in fundraising, printing and mobilising the liberal community in the Fattis and Monis, Meat and Wilson Rowntree boycotts but did little in the Leyland strike despite the fact that assistance was called for at the outset. Nevertheless, however limited the support the workers were grateful for it. As Dampies put it: "So when the community came in, the area committees were formed by the community and the workers and at that point in time the people seemed to realise that they had help now because the community helped us really good".(66)

By the end of the third week of the strike it was clear that many of the workers had returned and that most of the rest had been replaced by scabs, and therefore from the second to the fifth week the area committees focussed much of their attention on trying to persuade scabs to leave the plant. This was done, for example, by going to the factory gates and speaking to the new recruits, talking to them on the trains and trying to appeal to them through the area meetings and pamplets and in some areas through door to door visits. A number of scabs did join the strikers. As one woman expressed

it: "My husband left me with 4 mouths to feed. I was laid off work. When I heard of work at Leyland, I went because the wages are higher than at other factories. It's hard to get work these days...The workers came to speak to me the other day. They say that we must stand together, that we are all brothers and sisters and that we must not break the strike."(67) However, because of the high rate of unemployment in the Western Cape and the lack of mass mobilisation around the issue, those scabs who did join the strikers were simply replaced by others. A large number of these workers were women, who, according to Pitlo, made up 30% of Leyland's labour force by the end of May whereas previously they had made up less than 10%.(68)

In the Leyland strike the role of the press was particularly significant in influencing the direction and outcome for a number of reasons. Management was able to use it very effectively both in getting statements printed and in extensive advertising. It was only in the first ten days that the strike received front page coverage and at this time there were often no statements from the union. As one journalist put it: "There was constant suspicion on Foster's side of the press. He was constantly complaining that the union's side wasn't included. Foster was the first guy to go to the press. But from then on it was very difficult to get hold of him and pretty soon people started going back. The lack of news from the union gave the impression that the thing had wound down".(69) However, after the first two weeks the union did send frequent statements to the press but very often these were not printed, (particularly by the Cape Times) or they were relegated to the centre pages. This is partly a consequence of the lack of commercially 'newsworthy' activity. In the Fattis and Monis and Meat Workers strikes the boycott of products, as well as pressurising management and providing areas for community support, also meant that the actions of the boycotters received press publicity through their guerilla theatre.

During the strike over R10 000 was received by the union from the community. This is besides the money which was channelled directly to the area committees which meant that a total of over R25 000 was received.(70)-(Compared with R100 000 in the meat workers strike). However, to pay a worker R10 a week, the union needed up to R200 000 weekly and they were not able to raise this.

International support for the Leyland workers played an important role in pressurising management as well as in encouraging the workers. However the union always stressed that "the strike could not be won through international pressure or the courts but that it had to be won through the

strength of the workers and the support from the community. Pressure from the courts and from international support should be used from the basis of the strength of the workers".(71) Overseas pressure came from a number of sources, was well organised and probably had more effect than it would have with a privately owned company. Considerable support was given by overseas unions. Telegrams of solidarity were received from ICFTU, the ILO and the International Metal Workers Federation as well as from the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) within the first week of the strike, and this gave a considerable boost to the workers' morale.(72) The support from TUC, however, was more than just verbal as they contacted the trade unions representing Leyland workers in Britain. The Leyland Combined Workers Committee sent telegrams of protest to management in Britain and South Africa and one branch of the Transport and General Workers Union(TGWU) called for the blacking of goods to South Africa, particularly to prevent shipment to South Africa.(73) At the same time the anti-Apartheid Movement and SACTU publicised their support for the striking workers, and spoke at meetings attempting to mobilise shop stewards towards blacking action,(74) while newspapers such as the Socialist Press and Socialist Organiser covered the strike and called for support. An important role was played by the British Labour Party which soon expressed its condemnation of South African management and expressed its support for the Leyland workers.(75) And a number of Labour M.P.'s wrote to Edwardes and took up the matter with the Department of Trade. Furthermore, a member of the party's Africa sub-committee, Mr. Alan Kitson, met with the president of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, Mr. Terry Duffy and with Leyland management. British Leyland management agreed to instruct Leyland (SA) to begin talks with NUMARWOSA within two hours.(76) But later both British Leyland and Leyland(SA) denied that there had been any pressure: "There can be no instructions from Britain because authority to negotiate with the union lies with local management".(77) At the meetings British management had agreed to pressurise its South African subsidiary if NUMARWOSA was prepared to withdraw the pending court case against the company. This information was relayed to the union on the evening of July 8 and by this time it was too late as the case had been heard on the evening of July 8 and after this Leyland denied that the agreement had taken place.(78) However soon after these meetings there was formal contact between Leyland management and the union.

International pressure played four important roles in the strike. Firstly,

there was the real threat of blacking action. In the third week of the strike the British Leyland Shop Stewards voted unanimously to black vital parts and kits destined for South Africa (79) and pressurised British management into agreeing to negotiations, although at the same time it was partly because of these negotiations that nothing materialised as far as blacking action went.(80) Secondly, it played a role in embarrassing local and overseas management of a company that was particularly sensitive to this kind of pressure. Thirdly, it encouraged the workers, especially in the first month when community support was limited. As Foster expressed it: "Look we received tremendous encouragement - telegrams and so on from overseas and this was well received by the members - knowing that other people are aware of their problems and they're not alone in the struggle...The British trade unions - they tried to do something about our struggle - but rather too late of course".(81) Fourthly, international pressure played a role in keeping the issue 'alive' in the local press.

By the end of June it had become clear to almost all of those involved that the original demands of the workers would not be met and that the strike was beginning to fade. The Wilson Rowntree Boycott Support Committee was asked to concentrate on Leyland for a week and the 'Leyland Support Week' was organised by the end of June (in the seventh week of the strike). Although, in retrospect, many have argued that this kind of action should have come earlier, it nevertheless gave a significant boost to the strike which certainly helped prevent it from degenerating further. Sixty-one community, student, sports, church and trade union organisations 'pledged their full support for the legitimate demands of the workers'.(82) During this week significantly more was done as far as publicising the strike as well as collecting the food and providing transport than previously. In this week, for example, over 100 000 pamphlets were distributed.(83) However, the support from the 61 organisations should not be exaggerated. Firstly, many of their activities did not go beyond distributing pamphlets and in some cases went no further than formal statements of support. Secondly, there was a considerable overlap in the organisations represented. Thirdly, many of these organisations were hardly mass based, for example, the churches who organised support for the Leyland issue seldom went below the pulpit.

The Leyland Support Week came to its climax with a succesful mass meeting attended by over 2 000 people at the Halt Road Cinema on June 30, at which Bishop Tutu lashed out at foreign companies and called on the British Ambassador to intervene.(84) A resolution was passed to this effect: 'Failing

this, we, as part of the oppressed community, have no option but to call on Leyland to withdraw from our country'. Tutu then went on to say that foreign companies were only allowed to operate in South Africa 'out of the kindness of our hearts'.(85) Nevertheless Tutu's presence did give some publicity to the meeting (although it was not very widely covered in the press - an indication that Leyland's extensive advertising was having its effects on editors). The resolution was sent to the British Consul-General in Cape Town, Mr. Alan Elgar, who said he was unable to intervene: "While a close interest is kept in the industrial relations of British subsidiaries in South Africa, we cannot intervene in any industrial disputes even though it may involve a British subsidiary".(86) The support week and mass meeting came at a time when the strike was losing momentum and was used to tap the last that could be gained in terms of support and pressure. It also served to give the workers a 'morale boost' and to draw links between the trade union and community struggles. During this week a number of workers also visited community group meetings which further helped to secure links. As Dampies put it : "The 61 organisations were the biggest that any union in South Africa had the support of - so many of these people".(87)

After the support week the only important development was the court case in which judgement was reserved in the Supreme Court on the application by nine dismissed workers and the union, for an order declaring their dismissal a 'wrongful breach' of their contracts of employment.(88) The workers contended that they were not properly dismissed and that they should be allowed to go back and that the correct procedure be followed. The company contended that in view of its commitments, it was compelled to dismiss the striking workers and to employ new people. They argued that the dismissal of the workers followed a breach of contract and therefore was not unlawful.(89 The decision to go to court was taken because everything else had failed and management still refused to negotiate. However, it was repeatedly stressed at mass meetings that: "Our struggle is at Leyland and not in the courts".(90 Because of the reserved judgement (in January 1982 the court had still not reconvened, despite the fact that it was an urgent application) the court case per se had no influence in affecting the outcome. However the negative publicity did play a minor role. Subsequently area meetings and support continued, although the supply of food parcels and money was almost exhausted. Funds continued to come in slowly (for example from the July 14 Malopoets Concert) but it had become clear that the remaining 520 workers' situations were desperate and that a settlement had to be found.

The Settlement

Immediately after the strike began there were attempts to start negotiations but these were unsuccessful. However, in the first week management met with the union unofficially on a few occasions. According to Haylett: "Even before we reached agreement and they decided to come back, any matter which the shop stewards wanted to raise was done through the normal channels".(91) And for the week after the 14th the chairman and vice-chairman were in constant contact with management despite the fact that according to management 'their services had been terminated'.(92) Foster also had discussions with management over this period. But frequent talks over the next week failed to produce any settlement although both sides publicly emphasised that: 'the door is still open'.(93) The first official rounds of talks were held on June 18 when the union's General Secretary and executive met with Leyland's lawyers and tried to get them to agree to reinstatement. However, no agreement was reached. Prior to this management had applied for the establishment of a Conciliation Board but as has been mentioned this did not materialise.(94)

After the failure of the June 18 meeting, management appeared to be reluctant to talk and were consistently unavailable for communication with the union, because according to Pitlo: "...as far as we are concerned the matter is in court. We must await the outcome of the court proceedings". Once judgement had been reserved management were in a position to negotiate. While they had managed to recruit unskilled workers without any problem, and while some had been trained, the problem came with the skilled and semi-skilled workers. Because of the lack of other companies involved with motor assembly, the skilled workers needed could not be recruited from elsewhere. A large number of the 520 remaining striking workers were skilled or semi-skilled workers, whom the company had not managed to replace. Most of the assembly line workers returned and some of the most active were those, from, e.g., the paint shop and the mechanics department who were higher paid and more skilled.(95) So although production was slowly increasing, it was certainly not yet 100%. Also many of the vehicles produced were of poor quality and according to the union, by July about 60 had been returned.(96) Also, although the union's position was desperate, the number of workers returning had slowed down to a trickle by July. So by this time management realised that it was in a fairly strong position but that it needed the skilled workers (of the 520 remaining at the end of the strike over 60% were skilled

or semi-skilled).(97)

As far as the workers position was concerned, by the middle of July material support had almost dried up and it had become clear to most of them that in order to be reinstated without victimisation, and while they were still united, they would have to be prepared to drop their wage demands. As Foster expressed it: "Eventually the thing turns around and you've got to start battling to get people back in their jobs, you see, instead of trying to pressurise management to give in to your demands. And the same thing happens here. Eventually the thing of the demand for money gets put aside and the new demand comes for the re-employment of these people."(98) It was decided to negotiate with management although there appears to have been dissatisfaction over how this was done amongst some of the workers. However most of the workers understood that there was no other alternative than to reach a settlement as soon as possible. As one community activist put it: "It's very difficult. But from the workers I know - generally they were prepared to accept this deal because they realised that there was nothing else that they could do."(99)

On July 17 a mass meeting attended by 450 of the remaining 550 workers, was held. They unanimously voted to reject a proposal by the company to phase in the re-employment of the workers. In Leyland's proposal no promises were made to employ all the workers. They stated that they would be prepared to re-employ about 150 workers in the following week and then more as vacancies became available. The workers resolved not to return to work unless the proposals included the employment of all the workers.(100) Six days later management submitted new proposals. These differed slightly from the previous proposals. They meant that 170 workers would be taken back before the end of the month. After that, a further 200 would be taken on from August 3 when new vacancies occurred, while the rest of the workers would be employed at a rate of 10 - 30 a week. Meanwhile, the workers agreed that those who got their jobs back would support the others by paying R5 a week each. Workers would be taken back in order of seniority and would be placed in positions as near to their previous ones as possible.(101) Their pay would be the same and they would not lose their pensions. Most of the workers felt it was the best that could be salvaged and they voted to accept it. One reason why they had been forced into this position was that between the meeting on the 17th and that on the 22nd about 30 workers had returned and been re-employed.(102)

From the beginning it was apparent that there were problems with the

implementation of the settlement and as with the December agreements, there was no joint press statement or signed agreement to prevent management from backing down. Workers were not taken back in order of seniority and many of the most militant workers, some of whom had been working for Leyland for many years, either were not hired at first or were placed in lower job categories. As one member of the Crawford Support Committee stated at the time: "Workers aren't being taken back in order of seniority, and mainly young people are being taken back at lower wages than previously. One worker I know from Crawford worked for Leyland for 20 years and built up a good salary and a lot of experience and now he hasn't been taken back yet."(103)

But the workers who seemed to have suffered most were those who were not highly skilled but who had long service records. For example, the union's vice president, Jack Dampies, had been working for Leyland for 20 years: "I was out for over 4 months and I earned R2,57 an hour at the time and now I'm earning R1,57 an hour. We were striving to get our original wages back but how it's going to be I don't know".(104) Many of the workers were clearly victimised for their central involvement with the strike and management admitted to putting comments like 'instigator',. 'low rate' and 'unsuitable' against the names of workers centrally involved. At this stage Pitlo said: "We met our social obligation by sending telegrams to long service employees during the strike reminding them they would lose long service benefits if they did not return."(105) Management also used blood pressure tests, medical examinations and other subtle forms of victimisation to keep active workers out.(106)

Foster threatened to organise blacking action from the British trade unions if Leyland(SA) did not keep to the agreement, (107) but clearly this was no longer a reasonable option. Foster then met with management over this issue and they told him that they could not process enough people per day. This was eventually sorted out and in the end they only refused to re-employ one worker, ostensibly on the basis that he had previously had a poor work record. He had been a member of the workers' executive committee.(108)

Once most of the striking workers were back conditions on the factory floor began to improve. Before most of the workers had returned and the union had reorganised, conditions were appalling. Foremen and superintendents treated the workers harshly - suspending people for going to the toilets and sacking them for being there more than 10 minutes, suspending people for being sick and so on.(109) As Gantana put it: "In our absence they treated

the blokes worse than slaves - they told them that there would be no more union and so on. But there were certain things in our favour - they had lost a hellavu lot and they were firing thirty or forty people a day and so production was not what it should have been."(110)

Although some of the workers returned disillusioned and demoralised the harsh treatment they experienced soon made them realise the need for organisation was essential. When the union president, Nathaniel Gantana, returned they applauded him and soon were asking him, Foster and the rest of the executive to begin organising again. The union now has 2 000 members which means that 90% of the workers have signed up, and this includes nearly 800 members. This surprised management who expected very few old and new members to sign up. The union has also begun training the new shop stewards, although in some sections there was difficulty in getting workers to come forward. (By mid January 1982 there were 8 shop stewards at Elsies River and 11 at Blackheath) (111) At the end of 1981 the union started negotiations again. In July they received their 9c an hour increase and in September they received a further 7c which means the minimum wage is now R1,46 an hour. (Jan 20 1982) There is a deadlock over wages and management have said they intended to declare a dispute and go to the Minister if necessary.

An interesting new development is that over the last 2 months the parts have been arriving which the British workers had handled in June and July. A large number of them have come damaged, which the union feels is an indication of industrial sabotage from the British workers.(112) On February 2 1982 Leyland (SA) anounced that its talks with NAAWU had broken down and asked the government to appoint a statutory conciliation board after declaring a dispute with the union. This raises the possibility of a legal lockout by Leyland. If the Minister does not establish a conciliation board within a specified time, or the board fails to settle the dispute the company could have lawfully locked out the 2 200 workers. This came about when the workers rejected the company's offer of R1,76 an hour minimum and demanded R1,80. At a general meeting in January, the workers had accepted R1,76 on the condition that the company undertook to re-negotiate wages in June, which management rejected. 'Management's attitude is ridiculous' said Foster. 'They have said they intend to review wages in appropriate circumstances but refused to write this into the wage contract.'(113)

This development indicates three things. Firstly, that the company has not changed its hard line stance in dealing with the workers. Secondly, that

the union has learnt from its previous mistakes in insisting on a signed agreement. Thirdly, that the strike has not dampened the workers militancy. The Conciliation Board met and in March recommended a minimum wage of R1,76 an hour which was accepted by NAAWU.(114)

In economistic terms it would be idealistic to see the Leyland strike as a victory, although at the same time it was not absolute defeat and a good deal was salvaged out of a situation which could have left the workers demoralised and divided. On the one hand none of their demands were fully met and the settlement was not properly honoured by management. Their wage demands were not won and even now, some six months later, some of the workers situations are worse than before. On the other hand, all except one of the workers was reinstated which was a considerable achievement after 11 weeks. The 520 remaining workers returned relatively united and the union lost no time in signing up the rest of the workers. But the strike should not be assessed in these terms alone. Rather, the more important questions to ask are; what effects did the strike have on the organisation and democratic participation amongst workers? What lessons were learnt? Were the workers strengthened or discouraged? Did the strike help to develop relations between the workers and the community? Did it serve to increase the political consciousness of the workers? On these questions Foster said '... strikes are never lost - I mean the Leyland issue for example - you can say the strikes are lost in that we didn't achieve the objectives we originally set out to, for example, higher wages. On the other hand, you could say we've certainly won a helluva lot - I mean people have gained tremendous experience - not only the workers at Leyland but the community at large.'(115)

Although at the end of the strike some of the workers did at first feel demoralised and defeated their enthusiastic response to the union, perhaps spurred on by their harsh treatment without it, indicates that these feelings were not permanent. Some of the mistakes and problems with the strike have been alluded to above, but it is clear that there were also many lessons learnt. As Dampies expressed it: 'Yes there were a lot of mistakes and a lot of lessons learnt. Firstly as a union you've got to stand together because solidarity makes you strong'.(116) Many of the problems and mistakes come from the lack of previous experience of this type of action. Some of them relate to the work place, the need to sign all agreements, the need for greater active worker involvement, the need for more worker education. These problems have been recognised within the union. Other problems relate to the union's relation with the community - the need to work closely with the

press, the need to build up close relations with the community groups, the need to set up a support committee as soon as possible. Other problems were less easy to deal with. For example, the fact that the workers were so widely dispersed through the Group Areas Act made general meetings difficult for all the workers to attend. Also the fact that at the time the emphasis in the community groups was not on mass action but rather on consolidating in their own areas, meant that there was less support than there might have been and the level of mass mobilisation around the issue was limited.

However, whatever the structural problems and the mistakes of the strike much was gained. For the first time the workers experienced direct conflict with management, they experienced some support from the community and in this way their struggle was related to that in other areas. From the actions of British Leyland as well as the international support they were shown the role of multinationals and the fact that their struggle was not just a regional one. They were shown the limitations of the commercial press and the courts. Most importantly, they were shown the value of unity and shop floor democracy and the problems when these do not occur. The union emerged at the beginning of the 70s from being a reactionary and bureaucratic one and in many ways the strike was a consequence of a politicisation process of the previous nine years. Thus although the strike was not a victory, much was gained by the workers and ultimately they were strengthened and politicised by the experience of struggle.

This article was completed in March 1982. Since then press reports have indicated the agreement between Leyland and Sigma over the Elsies River Plant has fallen through, mainly because of the current recession.

Gavin Evans

Footnotes:

1 Virginia Engel, organiser for the Food and Canning Workers' Union, Interview December 23, 1981.

2 The Food and Canning Workers' Union has approximately 15 000 Coloured workers in the Western Cape; the General Workers' Union has 2 000; the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association has 11 000; the Media Workers' Association of South Africa has 700; the National Union of Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union 5 500; the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa has 500; the Jewellery and Goldsmiths Workers' Union has 500; the NAAWU Western Cape Branch has 2000. Wages Commission, Introduction to Workers' Organisation in South Africa, February 1982.

3 Cape Herald, July 3, 1981.

4 'Leyland Drives Ahead', advertising brochure, May 1981

5 Leyland (SA) also has important contracts with the SADF and other branches of the state. For example, at Durban's Republic Day Parade, backing up the rocket launchers were Leyland produced army vehicles, despite the resolution of the United Nations Security Council (of which Britain is a member) urging no sale of military equipment to the South African government. New Statesman, July 1981.

6 Cape Argus, July 10, 1981.
7 Interview with A. Haylett (Personnel Manager of Leyland (SA), October 6, 1981.
5 Cape Herald, July 22, 1981.
9 Cape Times, April 30, 1981.
10 Cape Argus, April 19, 1981.
11 Rapport, August 9, 1981.
12 'Support Leyland Workers', Strike Support pamphlet, May 25, 1981, p.3.
13 Haylett, op.cit.
14 Ibid.
15 Joe Foster, interview, January 15, 1982.
16 Haylett op.cit.
17 Ibid.
18 Joe Foster op.cit.
19 Haylett op.cit.
20 Nathaniel Gantana (WPMAWU President) interview, January 13, 1982.
21 L.J. (activist involved with the union), December 20, 1981.
22 Gantana op.cit.
23 Joe Foster, interview, September 8, 1981.
24 Gantana op.cit.
25 Support Leyland Workers, op.cit. p.1.
26 Foster op.cit.
27 Gantana op.cit
28 WPMAWU - Leyland (SA) , House Agreement, p.3.
29 Joe Foster, interview, January 15, 1982.
30 Gantana op.cit.
31 Jack Dampies, interview, September 28, 1981.
32 Joe Foster, interview in SASPU National Interview, September 1981.
33 Ibid.
34 NUMARWOSA, Report to the NEC, September 19/20 1981.
35 Joe Foster, interview, SASPU National Interview, September 1981.
36 Joe Foster, interview, September 8, 1981.
37 Jack Dampies op.cit.
38 Foster, SASPU National op.cit.
39 P.L. Community activist, interview, September 28, 1981.
40 Cape Times, May 28, 1981.
41 On June 16, 1980, 4 000 workers at the Volkswagen plant in Uitenhage struck.
- On October 1980 3 500 workers at the Datsun Nissan Plant at Rosslyn near Pretoria who were earning R1,25 an hour struck.
- Later in October 1 000 workers at the BMW Plant at Rosslyn struck in demand for an immediate increase of 5c an hour.
- In April 9 1981 Sigma workers in Pretoria who had been earning R1,04 an hour struck and an agreement was reached raising their wages to R1,60 an hour.
- In December 1980 East London Mercedes workers struck and demanded R1,60 an hour in line with Pretoria and Port Elizabeth wages.
- In May 1981 Firestone workers struck and the workers at Ford and GM came out in support.

42 Gantana op.cit.
43 Foster, September 8, 1981.
44 Gantana op.cit.
45 Foster op.cit.
46 Gantana op.cit.
47 Cape Times, May 16, 1981.
48 NUMARWOSA, report to the NEC, op.cit., p.4.
49 Cape Herald, May 23, 1981.
50 'Let us Unite.Don't Break our strike', pamphlet, NUMARWOSA, undated.
51 Termination of Service notice, Leyland (SA), May 21, 1981.
52 Cape Argus, May 27,1981.
53 Cape Times, May 28, 1981.
54 Cape Herald, June 6, 1981.

55 Rand Daily Mail, June 10, 1981.
56 Dave Bleazard (Labour reporter for the Cape Argus) interview, September, 21, 1981.
57 Leyland press Statement, Cape Argus, June 10, 1981.
58 Cape Times, June 10, 1981.
59 Cape Argus, June 6, 1981.
60 Cape Times, June 8, 1981.
61 E.D. (Leyland worker), interview, September 28, 1981.
62 According to Dampies, Strand was the only area where there were major problems.
63 M.N. (Member of Crawford Support Committee) September 13, 1981.
64 L.D. (Community activist involved with the strike) September 18, 1981.
65 Cape Argus, June 2, 1981.
66 Dampies op.cit.
67 Grassroots, July 1981.
68 Cape Herald, May 30, 1981.
69 Dave Bleazard op.cit.
70 Leyland Report to NEC, op.cit. p.6.
71 Foster, January 15, 1981.
72 Cape Times, May 22, 1981.
73 Martin Plaut, 'International Solidarity and the Leyland Strike', September 1981.
74 Cape Times, June 10, 1981.
75 Labour Party Africa sub-Committee, Letter of Support, June 11, 1981
76 Cape Times, July 10, 1981.
77 Rand Daily Mail, July 10, 1981.
78 NUMARWOSA - Report to NEC, op.cit., p.6.
79 Rand Daily Mail, June 10, 1981.
80 Aneeze Salie (Labour Reporter for the Cape Herald) interview September 2.
81 Foster, September 8, 1981.
82 Statement of Support pamphlet from 61 groups, June 29, 1981.
83 P.L. op.cit.
84 Cape Argus, July 1, 1981.
85 The Herald, July 4, 1981.
86 Cape Times, July 3, 1981.
87 Jack Dampies, op.cit.
88 The Star, July 9, 1981.
89 SASPU National, August 1981.
90 Grassroots, October, 1981.
91 Haylett, op.cit.
92 Foster, September 8,1981.
93 Cape Times, May 27, 1981.
94 Cape Argus, June 18, 1981.
95 A.Z., Community activist, September 29, 1981.
96 Rand Daily Mail, July 6, 1981.
97 Aneeze Salie, op.cit.
98 Joe Foster, September 8, 1981.
99 S.U., Community activist, September 5, 1981.
100 Rand Daily Mail, July 18, 1981.
101 Social Review, August 1981, pp. 24, 25.
102 NUMARWOSA Report to NEC, op.cit.
103 N.M., interview July 19, 1981.
104 Jack Dampies, op.cit.
105 The Argus, July 27, 1981.
106 Pat Horn: Conversation with Joe Foster, September 1981.
107 The Argus, July 24, 1981.
108 Foster, September 8, 1981.
109 Dampies, op.cit.
110 Gantana, op.cit.
111 Foster, January 15, 1982.
112 Ibid.
113 The Star, February 3, 1982.
114 Cape Times, March 5, 1982.
115 Foster, SASPU National, September 1981.
116 Dampies, op.cit.

Farm Workers and the

National Manpower Commission

Jeremy Baskin

Farm labour conditions are to be the subject of a National Manpower Commission investigation. An announcement to this effect by the Minister of Manpower, Fanie Botha, was received with great suspicion in farming circles. Farmers are one of the most politically powerful groups in the country, and have benefited from massive state subsidies, controlled prices and highly restrictive pass law controls. In addition the state has never intervened to prevent the extremely low wages and long working-hours which are almost universal in the industry. Organised agriculture therefore reacted suspiciously to the proposed NMC investigation. In early March, the Minister issued a 'clarifying statement'. Employer-worker relations in agriculture differed altogether from those in other sectors, he said. "There is and always has been a very sound relationship between employer and employe in agriculture." Farmworkers enjoyed "a whole package of privileges including free housing, free food, water, firewood, medical care, grazing for animals and land for the farmworkers own cultivation - the so-called 'payment in kind'. It was ignorance from non-farmers, he said, which led to much "unfair criticism". In order to protect agriculture from 'malicious attacks' and to

gain clarity on the distinctive problems of agriculture, the Minister had instructed the NMC to examine "factors which have an influence on the determination of conditions of employment", as well as the particular problems of agriculture. The Commission would also investigate existing measures and institutions and the extent to which these met "the needs of the industry". Special reference would be made here, "to the employers' need for greater certainty about the availability of workers". Finally, he stated that the investigation would work in close co-operation with the S.A. Agricultural Union (SAAU).

The SAAU is known to be sensitive about the conditions of farm labour. They have repeatedly denied allegations that conditions are bad. In a statement last year, SAAU spokesman Hans van der Merwe even went so far as to claim that farmworkers live healthier lives. "Farmers allow their labourers' families with them on the farm. They are well-fed and housed.... And, with the fresh country air it is a healthier life for them than it would be in the cities."

With the Minister having given explicit assurances to farmers that their interests will not be tampered with, it is clear what improvements (if any) farmworkers can expect. Certainly improvements are needed. Conditions on the farms are notoriously bad.

Conditions on Farms

There is no reliable, comprehensive study of the situation. But the known facts give some insight into the picture. There are approximately 1,2 million agricultural workers in South Africa, almost all of them black. According to a government survey mentioned in Parliament last year, the real wages and living conditions of farm workers have deteriorated in the last 20 years. At the beginning of 1980 the average monthly cash wage (value in kind in brackets) paid to full-time workers in various areas was: Eastern OFS R26.60 (R31.98); Western Transvaal R33,56 (R34.26); North-western OFS R33.51 (R49.99); Highveld R26.42 (R50.87); western Cape I R53.42 (R76.35); Western Cape II (Ruens) R79.08 (R67.24). In addition to the deterioration of wages over the last 20 years, account should also be taken according to the survey, of the fact that in this period large numbers of workers have suffered from the abolition of the labour tenancy system, by losing almost all access to the land.

Even the figures listed above do not reveal the full picture. Wages lower

than these have been reported on a widespread basis, Eugene Roelofse claims to have extensive evidence of wages as low as R8 - R15 per month. In 1980 a survey in the maize growing area of the Western Transvaal, revealed that over half the adult labourers were receiving R12 per month or less in cash. Their payment 'in kind' consisted of 1 to 1½ bags of mealie-meal plus an annual bonus of a bag of maize. A 1979 report revealed wages of less than R30 per month for a 72 hour week (i.e. approximately 10c per hour) on the Schlesinger group owned Letaba Citrus Estates. The general manager there responded by saying that his wages were <u>better</u> than on surrounding farms.

The quoted figures generally cover the wages paid to full-time workers. However casual labourers are used on a widespread basis and, together with domestics, usually earn even less. The Agricultural Census of 1976 gave the following average monthly cash wages (wages in kind, bracketed): Regular employees - R31.95 (R9.05); Domestic employees - R11.33 (R5.17); Casual employees - R9.01 (1.93). In addition child labour is used on a widespread basis, also at low rates of pay. Children were earning as low as R7 per month in 1977, and an estimated R10 - R11 per month in 1979, in the Albany district of the Eastern Cape. A 1980 report from the Rustenburg district of the Transvaal revealed women workers earning 25 cents per bag of onions filled. About six bags were filled per day with the assistance of their children, who were often removed from school for this purpose.

Estimates of payment in kind are usually provided by the farmers and are thought to be grossly inflated. It is unclear whether retail or wholesale costs are used for calculations. Neither are low wages and child labour the full story. Hours are long and paid leave is rare. In addition assault allegations have been proved in a number of cases. Whilst it is probably true that only a proportion of farmers are especially violent, there is s widespread, lower level of violence in the farmworker-farmer situation in general.

No protective laws apply to farmworkers since they are excluded from the Wage Act, Unemployment Insurance Act, and other legislation governing workers. Conditions of work and minimum standard of accommodation and feeding are laid down in Government notices, but little inspection takes place. Minister Koornhof revealed in Parliament last year that <u>no</u> government inspections of the conditions under which farm labourers work had taken place in 1979 and 1980.

One of the most restrictive pieces of legislation affecting farm workers is the pass laws. Most farms are 'non-prescribed areas' in which it is

impossible for Africans to ever receive permanent rights to live there. This means that old age or being fired bring loss of security. Such people are expected to move to the 'homelands', which they may never have seen. Even the Riekert Commission recommended the provision of accommodation for aged Africans on the white farms. They felt it was undesirable to uproot people completely in their old age. They recommended that the farmer be allowed to decide the issue, rather than the State. In responding to Riekert, the Government felt it could not accept this recommendation without further investigation. The pass laws also serve to restrict farm labourers to doing only farm labour. An example of how this works in practice, was given by the chairman of the Parys Farmers' Association in 1978. An agreement existed, he said, between the association and the district authorities that local farmers would not sign releases allowing African labourers to seek alternative work in towns and cities. The only way an African worker could change his job for one on the mines or in industry was by entering the Qwa-Qwa homeland and applying for a permit after six months. The poverty, lack of accommodation and high level of unemployment in Qwa-Qwa make this an unattractive proposition.

Changing Forms

South African agriculture has been undergoing many changes over the years. One of the most important, for farm workers, has been the abolition of the labour tenancy system. Under this system, workers had access to a piece of land for 6 months in exchange for which they (and often their families) worked unpaid for six months for the farmer. Variations on this model occurred, but the essence was access to land and unpaid labour in exchange. Over the years the government has been phasing out this 'semi-feudal' system, despite much resistance. Proclamation 2089 set the 30th September 1980 as the final expiry date for all existing labour tenant contracts. The system still exists illegally in areas of the country, but no longer on a widespread basis. For the labour tenants the change has frequently been disastrous. The loss of access to land has in no way been fully compensated by the kind of wages which have been given instead. Real living standards have dropped. In addition, vast numbers have been forced off the farms and into the 'homelands'. Agriculture appears to be decreasing its quota of full-time workers and relying on increasing numbers of casual / seasonal workers. The latter are frequently transported from the 'homelands' on a daily or weekly basis.

Despite the legal abolition of the 'semi-feudal' labour tenancy system, South African agriculture is still relatively unproductive and backward. Although mechanisation has been dramatic and agri-business is spreading (e.g. Anglo American now has fairly extensive agricultural interests) the conditions of labour are primitive. The contradiction between the relatively advanced productive forces and the extremely backward labour system, lies at the root of the crisis in agriculture and the low levels of productivity.

Piet Retief Area

The SALB has recently obtained a number of interviews with farmworkers in the Piet Retief area of the South-Eastern Transvaal. The interviews (extracts of which are appended) make no claim to be a 'scientific' survey of a representative sample of Piet Retief workers. Anyone acquainted with agriculture will know the near-impossibility of such a task. However, the workers spoken to are believed to be fairly typical of the area as a whole. The interviews reveal a grim picture and confirm many of the worst reports about agriculture. The workers interviewed spoke of others in the district who were in an even worse position. This should be remembered when reading their stories. The essential facts of the Piet Retief situation, as revealed in the interviews, are as follows:

- The labour tenancy system was abolished a few years ago and replaced by wage labour. The system exists illegally in parts of the area.
- Wages for full-time male labourers were R20 per month on one farm and averaged R15 per month on another. In the latter case workers earned R10 per month for six months of the year and R20 per month for the remainder. Women labourers earned R15-R18 p.m. Some women also did casual (tog) work in the forests during the off-season. For this they earned '8 shillings' per day. Women working as domestics earned R1 for three days work of washing and ironing. Child labour was employed at 50c per day. One worker spoken to earned R100 per month as a qualified heavy duty lorry driver.
- Workers received no bonuses and no overtime pay, although deductions were made when they took time off or were sick. Workers were expected to work throughout the year and were given no time off.
- Children from 12 to 14 years were expected to work on the farm. The only school was far away and took the children one hour's walk. The workers themselves contributed yearly towards the building of the school which only went as far as Standard Four.

• Hours of work were a major complaint of the workers. 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. were commonly spoken of as the working hours with workers knocking off at 3 p.m. on Saturdays. On one farm, workers spoke of a 7.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. day. However workers sometimes had to work later on Saturdays as well as working on Sundays, all for no extra pay. During the three harvest months workers are often required to work from 3 a.m. to midnight, that is, a 21 hour day! 'Tog' workers in the forests averaged a 10 hour day, 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. Rough calculations indicate that most are earning approximately 6c per hour!

• In addition to the low wages, most workers received a sack of mealie-meal a month and occasionally some sugar. One worker said he received 30 bags of maize at the end of the year. When workers needed extra food they would buy a sack of mealie-meal from the farmer for R20.

• Since the abolition of labour tenancy in the area, the workers do not have any significant access to land although most have a small garden with some mealies and pumpkins. Chickens were in evidence and some goats, but this depended on the relative wealth of the family. Stock is limited. Estimated of the number of cows which each family could keep, ranged from five to ten. A few keep above this number, on the quiet. All major expenses are paid for by the sale of cattle.

• Other features of the area were: pensions - these don't exist from the farmer, and state pensions are almost impossible to get; assaults - these were not common on the farms visited although women especially seem to be verbally abused and occasionally hit; illness - this can be a major disaster. The nearest doctors are far away and to visit one becomes a crippling expenditure. Many children seem to die. Accidents - Workmens' Compensation in practice does not exist. Two weeks before the interview, the farmer gave some food to those who had had an accident. But in other cases, the workers said, he gives nothing. Contracts - the workers are given no written contract although they have asked for one.

• Apart from the actual wages and conditions of work, the major problems which farmworkers faced were the ever present threat of eviction and the virtual impossibility of escape from farmwork because of the pass-laws.

• The old system was generally disliked because of the possibility of crop-failures and cattle dying and the consequences of having no money. But the new system was felt to be worse because people had lost access to land in exchange for pitifully low wages. Generally workers were burdened by debts to the farmer. Many sink under. Those who managed to keep going were being

sent money and goods from relatives in the cities. In effect the urban workers were subsidising the white farmers of Piet Retief.

Organisation

The farmworkers spoken to, all saw the need for some form of organisation and the need to stand together united. They knew about the trade unions in the cities. But their own environment was felt to be both structurally oppressive (pass laws, threat of eviction) and physically repressive (the power of the 'Boers' and their willingness to stamp on 'troublemakers').

Historically, the farmworkers have proved difficult to organise in South Africa. The ICU had some success in the 1920's, but theirs was essentially a peasant struggle. In the late 1950's and early 1960's SACTU did some organising, primarily in the Eastern Transvaal, not far from Piet Retief. In 1961, activists such as Gert Sibande, Uriah Maleka, Graham Morodi, John Nkadimeng and Elijah Mampuru were instrumental in establishing the Farm, Plantation and Allied Workers Union (FPAWU). But FPAWU was never very strong and seems to have disappeared in 1963/4 following the wave of repression of political and trade union movements.

The Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU/AFCWU) has organised, both in the past and at present, in rural areas and on farms in the Western Cape. But this has primarily involved workers concerned with the packaging and processing of food, not essentially farm labourers.

Most recently, the Orange-Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU) has organised workers on the Anglo-American owned Soetvelde farms, situated in the Vaal Triangle. The workers at Soetvelde are more highly paid than most and start at between R40 to R60 per month. OVGWU, which only began organising in August 1981, has already achieved a limited form of recognition from management. The main complaints of the workers concern wages and the fact that they lose their houses when they are fired or retire.

Conclusion

Soetvelde workers intend making their voice heard when the National Manpower Commission sits. Workers in Piet Retief are also waiting to hear what the NMC has to offer. One Piet Retief worker, earning R180 per annum, gave this message to the commission and the government:

"We are the people who live on the farms. It is alright about the whites. We agree that we live here on the farms with them. But let them give us money for our work. A white man has become a white man because of us. However much money he has it is we people who do the work. Why won't he give us money because we are the people who raised him up? We have made him a big man. But he ignores us. He gives us nothing".

If the NMC is to be prevented from ignoring the workers' views, it is vital that farm labour conditions throughout the country, get full coverage and that the idea of a special relationship between farmer and worker be exposed for the myth it is.

(April 1982)

(Note: The NMC is currently hearing evidence submitted to it, 2nd November 1982)

EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH FARM WORKERS IN THE PIET RETIEF AREA

Lorry Driver, 30 years old

I started working on the farm in 1974. When I started I earned R10 a month, here on this farm... I worked and worked and worked and we knocked off in the night and started every morning in the night, before the sun was up. There is no overtime (pay) here, never. When I go to Durban now they give me R1.00 to buy food along the road. I go to Durban and come back. The lorry breaks down on the way. I struggle to fix it. With my money I try to make sure the lorry is alright. I phone them with my money... They never pay me back for that money I spent. You struggle and struggle for them to repay you the money you've used on the road, but you never get it. You eat your own money on the road.

My job is to deliver to Springs and come back. Sometimes I go to Pretoria. Whether the road is long or short they give you nothing. Even if we work till late at night we don't get overtime pay.

We don't get leave either and no back pay. We tried to get him to give leave, we all sat down with him and spoke. He said "we'll see".... We said "we won't leave in this way, baas". Even when we ask for money he doesn't agree. And we ask him to write down our contracts - that he will give us beans and meat and mealie-meal. Not that he should give us only mealie-meal and some sugar. Now he gives us only mealie-meal and a little packet of sugar every 3 months. He doesn't want to give us the other things he

promised before. And he refuses to write down the contract....

At harvest time I wake up at 3 a.m., I drive and go to the korporasie. What time will I come back? I'll get back at midnight or half past 11 - no overtime. And then again I must wake up at 3 a.m. and drive. It makes you furious and it makes you sick. My body is always painful inside. Whether I'm sick or not I must work in that rough way. There is no leave either.....

At the moment I earn R100,00 a month. I am a driver. In Jo'burg I would earn much more than that. If I leave here this white man will expel my mother and father...He will say they don't work and their cattle are eating his grass....

He wants us to make our wives work. But we refuse.... because he robs us. If you do bring your wife out he shouts at her, he beats her, whereas you yourself don't hit her. He hits them and shouts at them. He also hits men, but women! And that woman is yours, you've paid lobola for her, and yet he hits her.

He wants women because he pays them less. They get R15.00 or R18.00 a month. The women complain they don't want it. They work in the fields...

About 3 years ago they changed the system (of labour tenancy). They said they didn't want cattle, they didn't want us to plough. They said we would work right through without leaving. They said we would be paid a wage instead. They said they would give us free "behind the machine". But they don't give us these things. They said our wages would go up regularly. But it never goes up.

At the time that they talked of the changes we thought they might help us. Because it's true that we have no place of our own. Where we live belongs to them. If they fire you, you lose your house, your cattle, everything. So we thought the new system might be better, but <u>niks</u>.

It's not really that we want to go back to the old system; if only they would give us proper money and a proper amount of mealie-meal and rations then this system would be better.

What we want is that people live together without hating each other, that we respect each other, that we earn equal money. There are some whites who work with us. But you find that this white man arrives today and yet he earns <u>much</u> more money than you do. And yet you are the one who knows the work. You are the one who does the job <u>and</u> you teach him. You say, "see, this job must be done like this and this and this" and you show him everything.

Without my driver's licence I would still be earning R20.00 a month. To

get a licence you've got to ask him (the farmer) to lend you money. I had to pay R300.00 to the driving school. He lent me R100.00. So I came back home and sold a cow for the rest. I repaid the R100.00 that he lent me. He subtracted it from my wages, bit by bit. So I got my code 11 licence. It has helped a lot.

We tell them (the farmers) we often tell them ....'this thing you've done makes us suffer'. We tell him that this business of making us work right through without a break, is bad. Even prisoners don't have to work right through.

He says "we'll see". But he leaves everything 'net so'. If we go back to talk about the same thing he says 'no, we've already dealt with that problem'.

Everything belongs to him. But it (our problems) never go into his head. How can it when we are Black people.

Farm Worker, 58 years old and Female Members of his Household

Old Man: The story of our life is that we were born on the farms. We work here on the farm. We work for 6 months for the farm and we get R10.00 a month from the farmer. That money is enough to buy tobacco only for smoking and one candle. Before the next month comes that R10 is not there, it is long finished. You have to go somewhere else and borrow money. And then at the end of the month you have to take your next R10 and repay it to that person. Because you become very bankrupt during the month and you have nothing in your pocket.

Yes, as for us, we live on the farms, we were born here. You work for something which is not there. We have no leave, even at the end of the year. We work right through. There is no bonus. You are not allowed to leave and work outside. When you are finished with the farm and that R10.00, you get R20. Now it is said you are working for wages. For these months that you would have left the farm, you now work for R20.

Why don't you leave this place?

We are not people who are visiting, or people who are passing through. We were born here ... right here on this farm.

We have cattle. Even if they are only 2 or 3. Some have 5, some have 6. Yet we will all work in the self-same way. If you raise 10 cows they don't

want it. No. They say they are too many. They complain that they are grazing. That their grass will be finished by the animals of black people. They say their cattle must also eat and the farm belongs to them. If you buy a cow you mustn't bring it to the farm. You must find another place for it. But where will you find a place because all places are the same.

We don't plough. We get "behind the machine". They don't want us to plough. We must be given maize by them at the end of the year. They give us 30 bags, yet look how many children we have here!

Farm workers in the Piet Retief area standing outside their house.

Do you have children in Johannesburg who help you?

We do have children but it is the same with the children. In Jo'burg everything has gone up and so their money gets finished buying food there. There is nothing we can look for there. Even if we look for money, they are far away and we look for 100 pounds or 200 pounds. Here we think you have a great deal of money if you have 100 pounds. But really it is not much

anymore.

How did the 6 month/6month (labour tenancy) system work?

You worked for the farm and for a place to stay and food to eat. For these months you got not a cent. Nowadays, for that 6 months on the farm we get that tobacco money of R10. For the extra 6 months we get R20.

Today we get paid R20. Last month we got that R10. Look, here is my R20. One month's full pay!

The one we are working for now is Piet Crous. He is a 'Boer'. We work from 7.30 to 5 during the week. On Saturdays we knock off at 1 p.m. and get home at 2. Sometimes we have to work on Sundays and we get no extra pay for that.

Things were better before, at least we ploughed and got our own food. Now you don't plough or raise stock. We used to raise cattle, 20 or 30 or 40. And if you had a problem you sold it.

Now, when a calf is born it must grow up and then you must sell another cow and keep the calf. Or you must sell the calf and keep the cow. I'm not allowed more than 6 cows. He took our fields. He is not ploughing them. They are left just like that. All the whites around here changed at the same time. The old system was better.

The children, they are not healthy. Nobody who lives here on the farms is healthy. Our lives are heavy. Yet if you want to take your things and leave, how can you go? What money will you use to move your possessions? And your cattle, where will you take your cattle? Some try to run away to the reserve.

When I am old these young boys will take my place on the farm. If you get old on the farm then the Boer comes and says, "you can't stay here if you are not working - where are the children"? And the children have run away. They run away from this system of working for nothing.

Some whites take children even as small as this one of 12 years. Here at this farm they don't do that. They give him a chance to grow a little. We have bigger children who would work if they were here, but they have gone to Jo'burg. They are running away from this little money that the farmers give us. Some of the children send us money, others don't. The children run away because there is no future here but to work and work and work for ever and ever. To be clever and to earn R5 and you are not allowed to look the white man in the eyes. So you run away.

They sign our passes. But not every month. They sign to show you are on the farm of a certain white man only. They register you once and then it is over. Even now our passes are not here, the white man has got them, I don't know where.

But what if you want to leave and go somewhere else?

No, that is not allowed. You must work here with him. The women must work here, every Monday.

Women: We wash on Mondays and iron on Tuesdays. All that for R1, also on Friday. That is R1 for 3 days. We cannot refuse because we live here on the farm. We have no other place to live, and he could expel us at any time if we refused.

Old Man: We can see that this white man is a big man and he has money. Only he doesn't want to pay. He has many hundreds and hundreds of cattle and sheep as well and he ploughs many crops...

We hear that in the unions such things (i.e. as wages etc.) are discussed. But how will that happen here when there is no unity. What can you do. We hear....that there are laws - which are like this and like this and like this and that people can turn companies to stick to these laws. But here these whites don't want unions, they don't want us to speak to them. And there are others who will go to the white man and say, 'this union is speaking about you whites'. Those are 'impimpis'.

That old system of raising cattle with your own strength, there is nothing like that now. You milked at home so that the people at home ate milk and sour milk. Today that is no more. Today we owe that white man with many days work because there is nothing we can do. There are no cattle we can take out to sell to cover emergencies.

The best is that the whites agree to let us raise cattle in the way we raised them in the beginning. We raise cattle and goats and plough.

If they gave you R100 per month, would you prefer that to the old system?

Look, that 50 pounds will get finished buying food. If he gives you that 50 pounds, maybe miskien maybe (it's o.k.). But you yourself will be making a mistake then. Because if we agree to do that, then everything goes up again (in price). No, it is better to plough, raise our cattle and live as in the old days.

Woman: Even when the girls work and the boys and their father, we still get nothing. There is still no money. I too work at the farm doing washing and yet I don't want to do that because it is for nothing.

We women earn 8 shillings a day if we do temporary jobs - that was in the 6 months we were not working for the farmer. They don't let you go out to do temporary work. They say you cannot leave. You cannot go outside the farm. They will really expel us.

The only place that we women can work is in the forests around here. That's where we earn 8 shillings a day. We start at 6 in the morning and stop at 4 p.m.

We must work like that because the children die otherwise. We see they are hungry. But what can we buy food with? Now we have no milk for the children because we have only 5 cows and only 3 have milk. So now we all go out to work on the farms to get food for the children.

(With the previous farmer) if you were herding his cows and one died or one was lost you had to pay for that cow. And from these wages he pays us, how can you pay him back? Without the Jo'burg family we would be finished.

Old Man: There are many other things we can complain about. But there is nothing we can do about them because we have no unity. On all these farms in the Transvaal where the farmers treat us like this, there is no organisation. They just chase us far away. They tell us things are like this and like this, and these are your wages. And we just listen. We hear that in other places people strike and then go back to work and their money has gone up. And here too we will get that way of solving our problems. It doesn't help to move and go to the next Boer because they are all the same. It is better to die right here.

Women: But the German farmers (nearby) are worse. Even if we want to go to the reserves now, what can we go with? And when we get there, what can we eat? We have nothing in our hands.

Old Man: There's another reason why we can't leave this place. When you get that R10.00 from the farmer, you borrow another R10.00 at the same time. We are caught by debts. The child is sick... With what do you send the child? Again you must borrow from the white man. Until, until, until you owe more than 100 pounds, not rand! So you can't leave because you must still repay that money.

And then there is the pass. That pass will bring you back fast enough. They would catch you.... You'd be brought back to work again. There is no place to run away to. You'll go out on your own and you'll die where you go

to.

When you get old doesn t the farmer give you anything?

Women: Nothing, nothing!
Old Man: (Laughs). You can ask for those pensions. 6 months and you still won't get the money. The pensions of Piet Retief, Ermelo or Amersfoort. You spend 6 months. You go by bus, you hire cars. You'll get nothing at all.... You'll leave it, you'll sit down. You waste your money for that transport just for a maybe chance.

Even if you get your pension. You get it today and tomorrow it is finished, and you are borrowing money again.
Visiting town dweller: If a child runs away then he will always know that at home they cannot live. And the children have no chance of learning. That's why people get such low wages. So they can't send the children to school.
Woman: Yes, that is true. Even now the farmer wants children as big as this one (of 12 yrs.) to leave school and come and work on the farm. Now you see how the whites are killing us, to stop us from educating our children. This boy of 12 also works after school and on weekends. By 2 o'clock all the children must be in the fields. If they work the whole day they get 50 cents, if they come after school they get 25 cents.

I see your house is nicely built (by you). What is the position of people who live in the brokendown shacks that one sees near the road?

1st Woman: Ah yes, Jesus. Those poor people!
2nd Woman: Those people have no children in the towns to help them. We would all be like them if we didn't have children in Jo'burg.
1st Woman: I'd die!
Old Man: I'd die!
2nd Woman: We'd all be dead!

Debate

Trade Unions and the Challenge to State Power

Duncan Innes

In the short article "Trade Unions and the State: Rebutting our Critics published in Vol.8 No.1, I sought to reply directly to some of the charge levelled against the article "Trade Unions and the State: The Question of Legality" written by de Clercq, Fine and myself in Vol.7 Nos. 1 and 2, and also published in Capital and Class No.15. In the present article I intend to assess some of the developments in the trade union movement since registration in the light of the issues and arguments raised in the original debate around registration.

Advancing the Registration Debate

Now that the registration of black unions has been with us for over two years it seems appropriate to consider its effect on those unions which have registered and on those which have not. The first point that can be made here is that it would seem from recent investigations as if there is no truth in the charge put forward by our critics (and most emphatically by the GWU) that "the requirements for registration presuppose that the workers voluntarily relinquish control over their unions".(1)

I have put this proposition on several occasions to workers in

FOSATU-affiliated registered unions and, out of the 200 or so canvassed, not one worker has felt it to be true. They are unanimous that since their unions registered, the extent of their control over the unions has not diminished at all. While I do not pretend that on its own this information can be anything other than superficial (since it does not derive from a "scientific" survey), I do think that this is an area of investigation whch needs to be developed, since I believe that workers' individual perceptions of what is happening to them are important. However, when these perceptions are combined with other facts, such as the dramatic rise in the number of FOSATU factories in which management has conceded shop floor rights to workers - from 19 before registration to over 132 subsequent to registration - it seems self-evident that registration has brought with it important changes as far as the trade union movement is concerned. The task, then, is to assess the implications of these changes for the future of that movement.

An important point to bring out here is the extent to which the state's policy shift towards registration of black unions actually made recruitment and organisation easier for the unions. When the state conceded to the black unions the right to register what it actually conceded was the statutory legal recognition of unions for black workers - a form of recognition which these unions had been denied for almost sixty years! The result of this volte-face in state policy has been a virtual explosion in black union membership. FOSATU's membership has risen from about 30 000 in mid-1979 (ie, prior to registration) to 95 000 by the end of 1981 (ie, in the post-registration period), making it by far the largest non-racial union federation in the country. SAAWU too, showed a spectacular growth in the immediate post-Wiehahn period to about 45 000, while GWU, the Food and Canning Unions and CUSA (to mention just some of the unions involved) have all grown over this period.

What is significant here is the way in which the state's recognition of black unions has benefited (in terms of numerical support and recognition agreements) both those unions which have registered and those which have not. The reason for this is that when once the state conceded through registration the principle of statutory legal recognition of black unions it summarily withdrew from the hands of employers a powerful weapon with which they had been able to beat their black employees - the threat of sanctions against them for belonging to unions which employers claimed were illegal. This concession thus made it infinitely more difficult for employers to resist the rising tide of unionisation among black workers - and a legal

nicety, such as whether or not the particular union involved had yet applied for registration, was obviously not a good plank to fight on when the principle of statutory recognition had already been conceded. Confronted with 80 or 90% membership of an unregistered union in their plant, few managements were going to be so foolish as to risk refusing to negotiate with (and therefore antagonising) their employees' unions on the grounds that these had not as yet applied for registration.

However, because both registered and unregistered union benefited initially from the shift in the state's strategy does not mean that there are not important differences between these two groups of unions. As de Clercq, Fine and I pointed out in our original article (2), unions organising black workers in South Africa conduct their operations on the basis of three different conceptions of the state (which are either implicit or explicit).

TUCSA, for example, sees the state as essentially neutral in relation to the struggle between contending groups of employers and racially defined workers - i.e. the state holds the ring within which a plurality of social groups vie with one another for social, economic and political advantage.

Most of the unions organising black workers, however, posit a rather different role for the state: one that is essentially repressive in character. The notion of the state as neutral in the struggle between social classes and groups, is an anathema to this latter group who understand the state rather as the political force through which the dominant classes and groups secure the subordination of the black majority in South Africa. But it is at this point that important differences emerge within this common position.

At one end of the spectrum there are those who argue that the repressive ends of the state can only be secured through direct coercion and the state is therefore seen as being incapable of granting any genuine concessions. In this view the state's coercive role is fetishised and it appears simply as an instrument of class domination.

At the other end of the spectrum the state is seen as a repressive force which does not seek only to secure its ends through direct coercion, but also, under intense pressure, may seek to rule through a combination of coercion and concession. In such circumstances according to this view, despite the danger of co-optation which clearly exists, dominated classes and groups may well be able to thereby take these concessions and turn them to their advantage, exploiting tthe contradiction in which the state is trapped. In order to decide whether this can in fact be done, one needs to assess the relative strengths of the contending classes on the ground - i.e. one needs to

take up the question of political tactics and to guard against the dangers of political opportunism.

These tendencies reflect different poles on a spectrum and no one union can be fully identified with either of these positions. In fact over time unions have tended to shift their positions under changing circumstances. However, it is because they work with different conceptions of the state that these unions tend to respond in different ways to state initiatives of whatever kind. The fact that, broadly-speaking, there have been three different responses to the state's strategy of union recognition (uncritical acceptance, critical acceptance and rejection) is <u>just one indication</u> of this underlying theoretical difference. In other words, the different union responses to registration is just one of the symptoms of much more fundamental differences in the unions' approaches to the question of state power - with, for instance, TUCSA content to accept it uncritically and FOSATU on the one hand and SAAWU on the other choosing different modes of challenging it politically. Clearly, in this scenario there is no room for a <u>modus vivendi</u> between TUCSA, and other two, but, given their common broad stance on the need to challenge the state, there <u>is</u> room for an agreement between the tendencies I have represented by FOSATU and SAAWU, so long as their underlying theoretical differences can be thrashed out and resolved. It is to be hoped that the present moves towards unity will provide an ongoing organisational forum within which such a process can commence.

For the moment, though, we need to take cognisance of the effects which the different strategic and tactical approaches that arise out of these different conceptions of the state have had on the unions concerned. The TUCSA tendency, clearly, makes use of state and employer protection whenever possible to get a toe-hold among black workers. Despite some initial successes, this approach is hardly likely to win any mass support among black workers precisely because it will not be able to win any substantial long term gains its members. But what of the two oppositional tendencies? Here it is clear that, while unions belonging to both have from time to time been the victims of state harassment, undoubtedly it is the tendency involving unregistered unions only which so far has suffered the most savage attacks - SAAWU, MACWUSA and GAWU being the most obvious examples. Raids on offices, detentions and bannings of union leaders, harassment of workers and union officials, the break-up of demonstrations and, more ominously, the arraignment of union leaders on charges under the security legislation are just some of the methods the state has employed against these unions. The

result has been near-disastrous for some of these unions, with SAAWU and GAWU in particular being thrown into considerable organisational disarray and losing membership as a result. At the same time representatives of the other oppositional tendency - such as CUSA, and, in particular, FOSATU - have been able to embark upon a phase of major expansion.

There are some who have sought to argue that this means that therefore FOSATU unions are scabbing on the unregistered unions (3) and that FOSATU's policy is one of reliance on the state for protection. Such as interpretation represents a gross misreading of the situation - and falls neatly into an ultra-leftist trap. FOSATU unions continue to rely on the organised strength of their members for support - but they do not sacrifice their members unnecessarily. Instead, they prefer to use every opportunity - including registration - to win the political space within which their membership can grow and strengthen itself. What is also important to bear in mind here - and this relates to the charge of scabbing - is that at the time when FOSATU unions were debating the question of registration among themselves, they participated in a meeting called by the GWU in order to get a unified response to registration. The unions adopted different approaches: CUSA followed a less critical line towards registration and did not set conditions for registration; the GWU, the African Food and Canning Workers Union decided to remain unregistered (SAAWU, MACWUSA, GAWU etc. had not yet been formed) and FOSATU decided to register on condition that certain of their demands were met by the state. The unions that did not register represented a minority of organised workers. Surely, it cannot be seriously argued, as Haysom reports, that FOSATU scabbed on those minority groupings.

But before FOSATU's strategy could be claimed as an unambiguous success, one would need to ask what costs the organisation had incurred in adopting this approach? Certainly, it has lost the support of many short-sighted intellectuals who have accused it of selling out - but one wonders whether this is actually a cost at all! I believe it is, in that the support of people sympathetic to the workers' movement, however misguided on occasion they may be, is important and FOSATU would do well to take the trouble in future to explain and debate its position more fully in public. Second there is the question of whether such an approach does not blunt the members' perceptions of their unions' opposition to the state's repressive policies. So long as the unions' tactics - and especially the reasons behind them - are debated as fully as current conditions allow by all levels of the membership within the organisation such an outcome is unlikely. It seems

that in fact a debate did take place within FOSATU around the question of registration. However, whether the workers involved in this debate were fully aware of all the implications arising out of the decision to register is an open question. I shall return to this question later, but for the moment it should be said that FOSATU does need to expand the facilities and resources which can ensure a continuous flow of discussion and debate within its ranks.

Finally, one needs to ask - and this is the brunt of the GWU's critique of FOSATU over registration - whether the Federation has not conceded too much ground in other vital areas of the workers' struggle, such as in the area of workers control over their own union, in order to win time to grow. I have already pointed out earlier in this article that workers in FOSATU do not feel this to be the case. But one needs to go beyond such an empirical approach to the question and ask precisely what status registration actually has in the state's strategy.

Registration and Workers' Control

GWU have argued that: "We are convinced that the requirements for registration presuppose that the workers voluntarily relinquish exclusive control over their union."(4) Where the state creates legal space, even for its own purposes, this view implies that workers cannot enter this space on their own terms - and cannot transform that space to their own ends. This view collapses the state's intention into its capacity to carry its intentions through - a capacity for realisation which is profoundly influenced by workers' resistance. This statement reveals a tendency towards mechanistic determinism: certainly there appears to be no room for the class struggle - for workers' struggle - in this perception of the world.

Recently I interviewed a group of black workers in a FOSATU union which, despite having an explicitly non-racial constitution, was only granted registration to organise one racial group of workers at a time or in a particular factory and I asked them how they responded to this restriction on their right to organise freely - and they told me they just ignored it, sticking instead to their own constitution and organising workers irrespective of race. And when I asked a group of workers in MAWU what they would do if the Registrar sought to shut down their union for failing to abide by the terms of registration (which he can only do under the most extreme circumstances), they simply laughed and said "let him try and we'll see what

happens". What these workers had grasped and were expressing - and what the GWU view cited above does not seem to include - is that "between the state's intentions and their realisation in practice falls a shadow: the struggle of workers".(5)

This unfortunate determinism in the GWU's theoretical premise (incidentally, it also characterises our other two critics' theoretical position) leads to a political strategy, which underplays the key role of worker resistance. It is because of this determinist approach that they have no alternative other than to conceptualise "the requirements for registration" as being all-powerful: i.e., they fetishise registration. For them registration becomes the means through which the state secures the co-optation of the union and wrests it from the workers' control. This is far too simplistic a formulation and when FOSATU workers declare that registration has meant no change in their capacity to control their union, they are far closer to the truth than the GWU's statement. For the controls which the GWU feared are not in the terms of registration itself - to argue that they are is both to fetishise registration and also to misunderstand the nature of the state's strategy. Registration is nothing other than the formal channed through which the state seeks to draw the unions - in order to lead them to the point at which the controls are really located: the present form of the Industrial Council system. Registration would indeed come closer to being the monster GWU painted it out to be if it necessarily and immediately forced the unions into the Industrial Councils. But it does not! Registration only makes it possible for unions to join the Councils if they so wish; it does not compel them to do so. And here lies the weak link in the state's strategy. For unions can register - but still not join the Councils. The Mine Workers' Union is a case in point of a union which has not been registered since as far back as the 1920's, but still has not joined an Industrial Council. The Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) provides another example. Thus unions can win statutory recognition and yet not fall into the trap the state has laid for them. Obviously, the state and employers may begin at some point to apply pressure on the black unions to join these Councils - and we know just what such "pressure" can involve! Yet by then the unions will in all likelihood be much stronger and more able not only to defend themselves but also, if they so wish, to seek to create alternative industry-wide bargaining structures. Attempts to create various alternatives are in fact currently being explored separately by both the GWU and the FOSATU affiliated National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW). As de Clercq, Fine and I argued in our original

article: "As presently constituted, the industrial councils threaten the power of black unions. To meet this threat, the unions could combine the struggle to transform the character of these official institutions with the struggle to extend alternative open channels of negotiation." (6)

Another important plank of our critics' argument against registration is that bureaucratisation of the unions is an inevitable consequence of the decision to register. For instance, the GWU has stated: "We are, however, absolutely opposed to being drawn into a highly complex, legalistic framework which allows for state intervention in internal union affairs and which assigns to union bureaucrats and legal experts a dominant place in the maintenance of that relationship....It is precisely in this sense that we have argued that registration is a total package which structures the relationship between the workers and the state, and between the workers and the bosses."(7) (My emphasis)

The inevitability of state intervention and bureaucratisation here flows from the structuralist/determinist theoretical approach which characterised the GWU's position and which is made most explicit in the last sentence. Again, the structures which the state and employers have concocted are fetishised into absolutes which leave no room at all for the workers' movement to intervene in this system and restructure "the relationship between the workers and the state, and between the workers and the bosses". As in their earlier statement, the GWU here seem to underplay the power which the class struggle has in determining "structures" and social relations in our society!

However, leaving aside for the moment these theoretical objections, we need to ask precisely how registration actually "allows for state intervention in internal affairs" and also how it "assigns to union bureaucrats and legal experts a dominant place" in the relationship between workers and the state and management? So far as I am aware, union officials in a registered union are required by the terms of registration: to submit all changes in the union's constitution to the Registrar for approval; to fill in a form once a year for the Registrar which reflects the union membership; to supply the Registrar with the names of officials in the union; and to submit audited financial statements. While these requirements are undoubtedly infringements of the unions' demand for complete anutonomy, they hardly constitute as the GWU believed, "a process which removes direct control of the union from the hands of the members".(8) And if they do inevitably have this effect, then since all of these controls - except the first - are now equally applicable to

registered and unregistered unions, can it be said that unregistered unions are no longer controlled by their members?

But perhaps this line of argument can be developed a bit further - even if bureaucratisation and loss of internal democracy are not inevitable outcomes of registration, are they not possible outcomes? The answer to this question must be: yes, they are. But although it is possible that this will be the outcome of participation, it is equally possible that it will not be. The point is that there can be no guarantee that the refusal to register will not produce precisely the same results - i.e. bureaucratisation and loss of internal democracy. It is only the vigilance of the workers' movement which can act as guarantor of internal democracy and workers' control of unions - and not registration or non-registration of unions! A few illustrations will help to explain what I mean.

First, one of our critics' argument is that those unions operating outside formal registration - i.e., the unregistered unions - are democratically controlled by their membership. Nicol, for instance proclaims that: "Registration and the widened possibilities for legalism contained within it will further tend to bureaucratise unions, will further remove the union from the control of the workers..... The embryonic organisation of the Independent trade unions can only be protected off the rack of registration".(9) (My emphasis) The clear implication here is that the unregistered unions are democratically controlled by their membership - or certainly far more so than registered unions. However, recent events in this country lead me to question whether Nicol's assertion is actually borne out in practice.

It is clear that unregistered unions like SAAWU, MACWUSA amd GAWU have suffered a heavy set-back as a result of recent state repression. Yet if one examines the form of this repression a paradox seems to emerge. The main focus of the state's attack so far has been directed against the leadership of these unions and yet the effect of the attack has been to seriously disrupt the union's activities as a whole. If these unregistered unions are to overcome these savage attacks it seems to me that one of the questions they need to ask themselves is: if they are based as strongly on democratic workers' control as they claim to be, then should the state's attack on their leadership not have had a less devastating effect on their organisational capacity? The answer to this question is by no means straightforward since it involves both recognition of the key role which leadership must play in the emerging unions and recognition perhaps of the need for a self-critical approach to their current organisational practices.

Regarding the latter point, a recent article on SAAWU by Maree, which is most sympathetic in its treatment of the organisation, nonetheless notes that this union had actually signed an agreement in the Johnson and Johnson factory without even informing the workers in the factory of the content of the agreement. Is it small wonder, then, that the strike in that factory collapsed?(10) Furthermore it is difficult to accept the rhetoric of workers' control in SAAWU when one learns that there is only one worker on the important Branch Executive Committees (the rest being officials) and that officials comprise the majority on the over-arching National Executive Committee. Although apparently decisions taken by the Branch Executive Committees are often referred back to mass meetings of workers for ratification, Maree has noted that:

"...participation at mass meetings clearly has its limits. At a meeting of 2000 or even 200 members very few of them can actually get an opportunity to speak especially when officials give lengthy speeches as happened at some meetings. Certain sensitive union work such as the drafting and hammering out of an Agreement cannot be done at a mass meeting either."(11)

It is of course difficult in the light of this not to see this process of referral as little more than the rubber-stamping of decisions already taken by union organisers - i.e., by the leadership.

The point which this case illustrates is that, whether the union involved is SAAWU, GWU, FOSATU, CUSA or any other, in order to practice real democratic control over a union's affairs the union leadership has to go much wider than simply calling a meeting of workers and asking their opinion (a practice which is euphemistically termed "mass participatory democracy" by some). If workers are to exercise <u>real</u> control over their union, the workers must not only be consulted, but must also be in a position to give an <u>informed opinion</u> on the matter under discussion. This means they must be receiving a general education, must be thoroughly familiar with the administration and running of their union, must be in a position to subject their representatives to close questioning, and so forth. <u>Unless these kinds of conditions apply we cannot talk about the existence of real democracy in the unions because no matter how often workers are consulted, unless they are able to give an informed opinion, they are doing no more than rubber-stamping decisions already taken by the leadership!</u> And this is why strikes - and indeed union activity in general - often suffer so badly in South Africa when the leadership of any of the emerging unions is crippled by state action! What needs to be emphasised here, then, is that whether or

not a union is under democratic control depends not on whether or not it is registered, but on whether facilities are provided for the union membership to increase their understanding and knowledge of the union and its role in society.

I have sought above to examine the role of leadership in the emerging unions by questioning whether the unregistered unions are in fact as democratically controlled by their membership as the anti-registration lobby claim. But one can also approach this quesion from another angle: i.e., by questioning the argument put forward by the GWU that registered unions are necessarily bureaucratic and undemocratic. Jan Theron is secretary of both the registered FCWU and the parallel unregistered African Food and Canning Workers Union. Both unions co-operate closely together (a fact which is symbolised in Theron's position as secretary of both), which therefore enables the unregistered AFCWU to benefit from any advantages which accrue to its parallel through registration. Theron himself has taken a strongly anti-registration position - which he articulated earlier this year at the memorial service for Neil Aggett - arguing that registration implies an inevitable surrender to state control. To some it is confusing that he can argue like this at the same time as he remains secretary of a registered union. However, the point I wish to make here is that the registered FCWU has a long and proud history in the struggle for workers' rights in South Africa: it has survived innumerable bannings and detentions; it has refused to enter the Industrial Council system; it has maintained a strong element of democratic workers' control; and it has been registered under racially divisive and co-optive legislation since 1956.

Of course, at that time (i.e. during the mid-fifties) there was considerable debate about whether or not unions, such as the FCWU, together withshould remain registered under the racially divisive and co-optive provisions of the Act, with important tendencies within SACTU arguing strongly for de-registration. However, despite these pressures, the FCWU decided to remain registered. The state was of course successful in co-opting many of the unions which remained registered under the Act, but certainly not all. The FCWU, together with the FOSATU-affiliated registered unions, NUMARWOSA and WPGWU, are examples of unions which, despite registration, have been able to maintain their independence and democratic structures - and make important contributions to the workers' cause! In other words, just as we saw evidence earlier which suggested that certain unregistered unions may not be as democratically controlled as they claim to be, we now

find evidence of unions which are relatively democratic despite having been registered on a racially segregated basis for over twenty-five years. This evidence usefully illustrates the point I made earlier: that registration does not determine whether or not a union is democratically controlled by its members.

Conclusion

I hope that these various points may serve both to correct certain mistaken impressions which may exist regarding the original position of de Clercq, Fine and myself and also help to advance current thinking around this important debate. Obviously, these are no more than pointers to guide future debate - they are not intended to provide conclusive arguments - but as such they do provide, I hope, some indication of the path along which the debate should travel. As the labour movement advances so the need arises for careful and intensive analyses of both the form and the content of that advance. I believe that recent developments in the labour movement have tended to confirm the view expressed in our original article that the decision by some unions to register at that time was correct. I still await an analysis which competently disproves our argument.

Footnotes:

1 SALB Vol 7 No 3 p 18
2 SALB Vol 7 Nos 1 & 2 pp 40 - 42
3 SALB Vol 7 No 3 p 32
4 ibid p 18
5 Fine, de Clercq and Innes SALB Vol 7 Nos 1 & 2 p 51
6 ibid p 64
7 SALB Vol 7 No 3 pp 20 - 21
8 ibid p 20
9 SALB Vol 5 No 6 p 56 - 57
10 SALB Vol 7 Nos 4 & 5 p 32
11 ibid pp 42 - 43

DOCUMENT

Retrenchment and Organised Workers

In this article the General Workers Union shares ideas on how to fight retrenchments.

We have all heard about the current recession in the South African economy - in fact it is always the workers who are the first to hear of a recession because it is inevitably the workers who carry the burden of an economic downturn.

How do we learn of a recession? Wage increases are smaller or non-existent; fringe benefits are cut; the bosses cut back on expenditure on health and safety. But the clearest sign of a retrenchment is the queues of unemployed workers - jobs are even more difficult to get and thousands of workers are retrenched.

Workers who have been in one job for years are suddenly out on the street. Some workers get small UIF benefits for a short time; others, like the workers from the Transkei, get nothing at all. Furniture that is bought on HP is reclaimed, people who suddenly cannot afford rent are thrown out of their houses, children are forced to leave school, young children have nothing to eat.

Difficult Struggle

The battle against retrenchment is one of the most difficult struggles facing the workers. In our experience we have learnt some ways to fight a retrenchment and we would like to share these ideas with other workers and unions.

The first demand that workers must make is that the committees or unions should be given long notice of an intended retrenchment. In the stevedoring industry the committee has to be given two weeks notice of a retrenchment.

The aim of this two week period is to give the committee time to fight the retrenchment. A very important weapon in the battle against retrenchment is information. The bosses must be made to provide full information explaining why a retrenchment is necessary.

Very often the bosses use a recession as an excuse to lay off workers and to get more production from a smaller number of workers. This must be guarded against, and it can only be done if we get all the important information out of the bosses. Moreover the bosses must give the workers time to think of alternatives to retrenchments.

Alternatives to Retrenchment

The most obvious alternative to retrenchment is a ban on all overtime. Except in very rare circumstances there can never be an excuse for retrenching some workers whilst others are working overtime.

Another alternative is short time. In other words to reduce the number of hours which all workers in the factory work and to share the burden of lack of work.

A third alternative which the workers in the stevedoring industry and in Dorman Long, an engineering firm, have thought of is unpaid leave. By this we mean that all workers are put through equal periods of unpaid leave - sometimes for as long as two months - so that, like in the example of short time, the burden of the work shortage is shared by all the workers.

In this system all the workers are, of course, guaranteed their jobs back at the end of the unpaid leave period.

Number of Rules

Finally, when a retrenchment is unavoidable - after the bosses have given information and all possible alternatives have been tried - there are a number of rules which should be enforced.

Firstly, the retrenchment should be strictly on a 'first in, last out' basis. In other words the workers with the shortest service must be retrenched first. Retrenchment must never be confused with discipline or with efficiency in any way.

Retrenchment must never be based on the worker's work record or any other factor than service. If not you would find all the workers' leaders retrenched or else you would find the old people, who have given years of their life to the company and, as a result, are tired and maybe a little slow, being the first to go. This is, of course, completely unacceptable.

Thirdly, there, is the issue of severance pay. Bosses are of course hardly ever willing to pay. They whine that times are bad (as though we don't know!) and that they cannot afford severance pay.

Boom's Profits

It should be pointed out to the bosses that the recession follows a boom. In the last boom - one of the greatest in South Africa's history - the profits of every company increased enormously. But now, as soon as business slackens, the bosses guard their bank balances and throw the workers - the same workers who made the profits in the boom - out on the streets. They can use some of their profits of the boom to support the workers during the recession.

Finally, there are a number of other things which should be remembered - firstly, all the bosses have contacts in other factories and they should help workers to find other jobs; secondly, the names and addresses of retrenched workers should be kept by management and they must be the first to be offered jobs when work increases again; and thirdly, workers must be aware of their UIF rights because, as small as these benefits are, they are at least something and, of course, it is the workers' money that has paid for these so-called benefits.

Different Society

In the end of course it is only in a different kind of society that the workers can be protected against retrenchement. Where booms and recessions will not exist; where factories will not be slack because the workers will have enough money to buy the things produced; where the goods produced will be the things that workers need; and where workers will work shorter working hours and have time to spend at their leisure.

But this is a long way off and we hope that these ideas will help in the battle against retrenchment.

INTERVIEWS

These are extracts from five interviews with mine workers dismissed after the strikes in July, and in one case, in June. They are parts of a number of interviews conducted in the Mount Frere district of the Transkei in mid-July 1982. They appear here without comment though they have been slightly shortened and allowance must be made for the translation from Xhosa. For an over-all analysis of the strikes, see the article by Jeremy Baskin in Vol 7 No 8 of the Bulletin.

21 year old Miner from West Driefontein

What happened?

Wages caused the strike. When we saw in our pay a rise - but for a very little amount - we got together and agreed the people on the next shift must not work. That was the night shift on Thursday. On Friday we sat in the compounds and didn't go to work. Everyone was involved - Sothos, Shangaans, Kavangos, Bacas and many others. We all stood together.

On Saturday at 8 am the compound manager came and said those who want to work must stand on this side and those who don't must stand on the other side. Most came to this side of not wanting to work. Few went to work. Then the workers started to throw stones on the compounds and burn cars - any cars - because we thought they must belong to management. Management called the mine police, but they couldn't stop it. Then soldiers came in helicopters.

What made the workers stone the compound?

When our managers wrote pamphlets saying they would not raise the money, we got furious. This whole thing of stoning windows and burning cars happened on the Friday when we all stood together. On Saturday a division came about. Those who wanted to go home got their belongings and were sent off. What made us stone the compounds? It was the spirit we had.

What was your wage increase? What job? What about communication with management?

My wage went from R42 to R46,20 a week. I was an underground worker. If workers had a grievance, they had to tell the monitors. The monitors tell the mine police. There is no liaison committee. Management wants people to have a fear of the police. We were scared of raising grievances because they would go straight to the police.

What kind of grievances did you have?

Well, once we had this grievance about food. Potatoes were being put in the same pot as carrots and pumpkins and the vegetables weren't being peeled. They were going straight from the garden to the pot. Management promised to see to it, but nothing ever got done.

Were you ever told about unions?

No.

What do you do now?

If I don't get work on the mines, I will have to try other towns. We were told at Teba that we would not get jobs on the mines again because we were strikers.

28 year old Miner from West Driefontein

What happened?

We noticed from our pay packets there was very little increase. We went to

our manager and told him we were expecting more. He said we weren't going to get more. We said: You had better discharge us then because we can't work for peanuts. He said if a man doesn't want to work, he's going to jail. On Friday we didn't go to work. Management's reaction was to call the mine police who threw tear gas at us and set dogs on us. Still the workers refused to go to work. There was fighting all day.

Two hostels face each other, number four and six. I was in number six when the workers from number four started throwing stones to warn us of the police coming. We heard fighting and shooting in the other hostels, but we were already alerted. Then police fired tear gas at us and three workers got shot. One was hung from the gate outside hostel number six by his legs to scare other workers.

What happened to start the riot?

Management sent the monitors around with pamphlets saying we must accept the increases and work or go home. Man, those pamphlets made us furious. Then police were called and fired tear gas - that was before the stoning started. We were all united.

18 year old Miner from West Driefontein

What were the strikes about?

Wages.

What happened?

People threw stones on the windows. The mine managers called the police and they threw tear gas at us. It all happened in an evening.

How did it start?

We noticed such a small increase. We didn't consult the manager.

What did you do?

I ran away from the other workers and left the compound, but I didn't have

enough train fare. I spent the night on the mountain. Since the strike, I didn't go to work. For a week we stayed in the compound before they let us go. We were not given tickets though we were discharged.

What did the police do?

There were strange police I didn't know in army uniforms. They were in vans and helicopters. There was fighting between those who went to work and those who stayed behind. People were beaten up but not really injured. I tried to go to work but I was prevented.

How was communication with management?

There are monitors that get sent to management. They talk about grievances, but nothing satisfying ever comes out of it.

In the fighting what happened?

I ran out. But each compound did what it wanted. The pamphlets are what really made the workers angry. We were told: if we wanted to go home, we could go home. There were also threats that the police would arrest us if we did not go back to work. That was all in the pamphlet.

What do you do now?

I still want to work. I would like to go back to school. I have a standard seven, but no-one will support me because my parents are old. But they told us at the Teba offices that they wouldn't take us back.

54 year old Miner from Buffelsfontein

What caused the strike?

The only main point was the money. The increase was not big enough. I heard on Friday that my wage was going from R6.05 (a day) to R6.82. I didn't agree with this 77c. The other workers were also unhappy. We got together and refused to work. We got no reply from our managers. They

simply brought in the soldiers who fired tear gas at us. We were arrested and went to jail the same day and were held until Wednesday the next week.

What happened before the police came?

We were waiting for the manager to explain about our increases. Instead of talking to us, he phoned the police and the soldiers.

Were the workers united?

We were all together. There was no friction between underground and surface workers. There was no difference of tribes. We all felt the same.

32 year old Miner from Welkom

What happened at Welkom?

We were actually striking for money. On the 15th of June our manager said we must work, and he would see to our grievance. The workers refused to go back until they got a rise. But the Sothos went to work. On their way back they fought with those who wouldn't work. All the Xhosas were on strike. Police were called and threw tear gas and shots were fired. One worker, Sonele Nonzala, was killed. Some of the mine police were beaten by workers.

Why were you striking over money?

We were promised an increase, but we did not get it.

What was communication with management like?

Before, our manager used to come when workers called, but lately he never came. The monitors took our grievances but we knew the manager would keep on promising and not keeping his promise. We were never told about trade unions.

What were conditions like?

We had very many accidents underground. I was also injured. I broke my thigh bone when a rock fell on it.

What do you do now?

I'm trying to get another job. I'm the breadwinner. I have two children and a wife.

C.T. CORRESPONDENT, Sept 6

Alusaf Shop Steward Speaks

I joined Alusaf in June 1979 working as an assistant electrician but eventually they changed me to a semi-skilled electrician. I was working with lights and plugs and doing maintenance. When a globe fused I'd replace them and check whether there wasn't a fault here and there. We were about 1800 workers at that time, but now we are more than that. The factory produces aluminium pig-iron which they sell in South Africa and overseas. They're in Richards Bay so they can export easily. They're situated near the harbour.

I joined the union in June 1980. The union emerged in May in the factory. The first meeting was in the township of Esikhawini, after working hours. I missed that meeting because I was visiting my parents. I went to the second meeting in June and joined there.

I was seeking for a trade union because I'd heard from friends who'd joined BAWU at Ngwelezane township, Empangeni. My friend told me about that trade union, and how a trade union works. So I was keen to join a trade union by that time. I was thinking about joining BAWU. But they were organising MAWU inside the company so I joined MAWU. I was thinking of the trade union as a lawyer. I became aware and found out that the trade union

is not a lawyer. It's not protecting you so that the company won't discharge you at any time. It won't give you any insurance benefit. Now I know that a trade union is not a benefit scheme, it's not a lawyer, it hasn't got the power to bring you back to work if the employer discharges you. It depends on the strength of the workers.

Many joined very quickly. When you attend a meeting they give you joining forms and a few forms to recruit your friends inside the company. They weren't scared to join.

At the time management called the (TUCSA-affiliated) Boilermakers' Society to come and join up the workers. The people refused to join the Boilermakers and were keen to join MAWU. It was very easy for us to join MAWU. Up to that time we didn't explain our problems to the management because there was a liaison committee which didn't have a right to speak with the workers. They didn't meet the workers. They just thought what the workers wanted and then they'd go to propose it to the management. And management decided to do it or to say 'this you won't get'.

When the trade union came to the factory they explained that we will elect our representatives and have meetings with those representatives and then take a decision together and submit it to management. By that time I was strong and was elected as a shop-steward inside the company. I was elected to the negotiating committee of workers. Management said they won't speak to us because they don't know us as shop-stewards. So we took the stand that if they refuse, we must call them on Thursday morning when everyone is there to collect their pay. Then we could meet management and if they don't want to speak to the shop-stewards then they can speak to the crowd. Management refused this and said OK we can come, and they'll speak to the shop-stewards.

There were five shop-stewards elected to sign the letter demanding recognition. When we submitted the letter they said they'd meet us in the afternoon, all five of us. But we said that actually there were ten shop-stewards, and they agreed to all ten. We were ten, ten on both sides at the meeting. All of them were wearing jackets. They didn't know what kind of people they were going to meet. They thought that we were going to fight them. We didn't take any organisers with us.

We discussed with the management why the workers reject the liaison committee and why they want shop-stewards and we explained that as we are the representatives of the trade union they must speak to us. They agreed and said they would do a secret ballot for election of shop-stewards.

They asked us about registration. At that time MAWU wasn't registered and we said we're not registered, it's not a thing that's precious for us, we don't even like registration. If he wants to speak to Metal and Allied Workers Union, this is only a name, but we are the workers. So he must speak to us. So he said he'll speak to us but he won't negotiate with us because we're not registered.

Then we asked for access for organisers to attend meetings inside the company. They agreed to that and said we can use the hall in the compound with the organisers.

June-Rose Nala and Alec Erwin asked to meet the management for negotiations. They said they won't come here but the management must go to offices at Gale Street, Durban. Mr. v. d. Watt went there. Then management came back to us and said they've talked to our officials and they haven't registered about Lower Umfolozi, so we must apply for registration. By that time there was no other negotiating which took place between the organisers and management except with the shop-stewards themselves. Because we are used to having a meeting with the management ourselves to push the working conditions, and dismissals and everything, without the help of the organisers. Since then till now.

We were dealing about dismissals mostly, and the pension issue and we were talking about the working conditions. The pension fund problem was that the management told us you won't get your money until you reach 65 years of age. They said they won't give us the contribution of the employer unless you'd worked 10 years. This created a lot of problems because there was nobody having that guarantee that they would reach 65 years. Also, there are people employed since 1972, who were used as cleaners. Some of them may be clever, and we said they must give them a chance to do other jobs. They agreed but they never did it. Instead they promised us they'd make an extension to the factory and would take all those peole and give them good positions. But they never did it, although they agreed.

They are scared of these people because they are more militant. Maybe they think that if they send them to this new company with new people, they'll spoil them.

The working conditions were very bad. Take myself for instance. They said they'll employ me as an assistant electrician. I was dissatisfied with that job because I was keen to do more job, and a more decent job. I was not allowed to work on panels and do anything like that. We think those people who are qualified for a job must be given an opportunity to do that job. We

didn't get any answer from management on this. They said if you want to discuss the working conditions and wages you must apply to sit in the Industrial Council.

The workers reject this completely, because we have explained how it works. We see other unions. All those people who belong to the liaison committee they joined the Boilermakers. We know that Boilermakers meets only once every three years on the Industrial Council. The workers want to negotiate inside the company.

Once the workers had joined the union there was a big change in their attitudes. Every worker thinks about 'impimpis' but there were no 'impimpis' before. There were 'impimpis' but they didn't use that word. Every worker is united not fighting each other. These people now are brothers, they are united. They sing freedom songs and everything. Also, they are now used to attending meetings. Before, nobody knew about meetings or attending even a single meeting, only church. Some of them didn't even go to church. They'd know nothing about meeting each other. Now, if we call a meeting, everybody will sit and listen to the meeting and ask good questions and we learn more from them and they learn more from the trade union as well.

They're learning their own power. If there's something happening to another department, they used to feel, this is none of my business, I don't care. But now they know that if a thing is happening to another department they must care because in future it's coming to him.

The trade union struggle has political significance. Some people used to bow when they see the white people saying 'baas, baas'. But we have changed that attitude now and everybody, if he's a man he's a man. I think this is a political thing. They don't feel victims of another nation now. Although they know that these people have got money, and are wealthy, the workers have managed to erase the slave from themselves by not bowing to anybody.

At the moment we haven't discussed about the political things in the trade union as such. We're only dealing about the problems inside the company and those problems they stick into politics, but not very clearly. They're concentrating inside the company, rather than going outside the company and seeing how the government ruins the workers. We discuss politics right inside the company, about working with a white man who insults you and then the management ignores it. Or maybe you've been hit by a white man and the management won't take any stand except to say he'll discharge you to save you. Maybe the white man said 'I'd rather leave the

company if this boy is still here'. Then the management decides to discharge you rather than lose this artisan.

If each company has been well-organised, we must mobilise them politically and bring all the shop-stewards into politics so that they can discuss it with the workers on the shop-floor. Some of the workers they think that once they win the pension issue, it's alright. Once maybe his case has been settled it's alright. He'll never attend any meeting. Once he gets a general increment and he's satisfied, it's alright.

It would be wise for us if we can teach the shop-stewards in politics as well. Teach them about what is happening outside the factories, what we are getting from the government. Although they do see it, they don't know what we must do. Take 1976, there was a big strike from the students, boycotting Bantu Education. The parents would hit us. I was at school at the time. My parents said when we came home, 'No you're not allowed to come here at home. You are naughty, you must go to school'. They don't know exactly the effect of that Bantu Education. We used to look at our fathers. They were matriculated and working as sweepers in the company and making tea. We thought this Bantu Education is not good and we boycotted it. I think there is no link being made. We must tell all the workers and shop-stewards what is happening outside the factories.

This issue of education is most important to me. Maybe in the future we can win the country, and take all the powers from the government, then we'll find problems about doing some jobs because we're not getting real education. Maybe we get independence or maybe we conquer that government and get hold of it. Then we must run the country. We can't run the country because we know nothing. But if we as the parents meet with the students and win the education issue then they will teach us the real education. Then it will be easy for us to run the country. It will be easy to demand the same wage as the white man if we are doing the same job.

I don't mean that when we take over the powers we'll say therefore that the bosses must go out of the country. I want equal rights. If we've got the same education we must be equal at work. All over the place we must be equal. Not that you are an Indian you must go back to India.

I was an electrician working in lights and plugs. Only white men were allowed to work on panels. This is not equal. The other day the foreman said I mustn't ask too much. This is South Africa not China. I don't know what did he mean by that?

J. Baskin, Empangeni, May 18, 1982

Note: Interview conducted in English.

SALB Publication guidelines

The South African Labour Bulletin is a journal which supports the independent 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 with the following publication guidelines:

- Constructive criticism of unions or federations in the independent labour movement 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.
- Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

Analytical articles	8000 words
Debates, reviews, Documents	3000 words
Briefings	800 words

- Contributions must be written in language which is clear and understandable.
- All contributions to the Bulletin must be typed and where applicable include proper footnoting and references.
- Except in the case of public documents, all submissions to the Bulletin will be treated in confidence.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS FROM JAN 1, 1983

To: **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**
4 MELLE HOUSE
31 JORISSEN STREET
BRAAMFONTEIN
2001
SOUTH AFRICA

NEW ___ Please open a subscription to the Bulletin beginning with Volume: ____ No: ____

RENEWAL ___

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

_____

OCCUPATION: _____

RATE: _____

PLEASE NOTE NEW RATES

RATES FOR EIGHT ISSUES

	SOUTH AFRICA	OVERSEAS
Workers	R 5,00	
Students	R10,00	£ 8/$18/R15
Salaried Individuals	R20,00	£14/$30/R28
Institutions, Companies	R40,00	£25/$55/R50