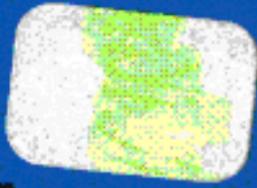


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**LABOUR
BULLETIN**

September 1994 Volume 18 Number 4



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Wage policy

The focus of this issue of *Labour Bulletin* is on human resources policies. HR policies

are inextricably linked to wages and salaries. In this issue almost every article is about wages – and about conflict over the fairness of wages.

Income differentials are frighteningly high, reflecting the devisions of apartheid. White company directors, managers and professionals are used to an extraordinarily affluent way of life. It is typical of the hypocrisy of this elite that they tend to accuse organised and militant workers of being the elite in SA – an elite which averages R2 000 (auto workers), or R1 400 (Pick 'n Pay) per month!

These income gaps, inherited from the apartheid way of life, are being reinforced by the headlong rush of a new black elite into the corporate world – and into the political world. Ministers, directors general, MPs, consultants, directors, HR managers – all confirm that the new SA, far from overthrowing the values of the old SA – that unthinkable large salaries, shiny top-of-the-range German cars and immense houses full of imported silverware are what proves a person's stature and worth to society. And the labour 'elite' struggles along with R1 500 or R2 000 per month!

The ANC missed a golden opportunity to establish a moral framework for a more egalitarian incomes policy by insisting on a simple and less extravagant lifestyle for its representatives in government. Now it will not be easy to fight for something different.

But the hypocrisy of the real elite should not blind us to the great wage differentials within the working class – and often within sectors. And on the margins of this are the informal sector, the unemployed, the people of Bloekomsbos with their 'labour intensive' project.

This wage anarchy faces the trade union movement with a major challenge. Should it try to develop a wage-levelling strategy, within sectors and across sectors? Such a

wage solidarity strategy would entail higher-earning workers limiting their wage increases to bring them in line with lower-earning workers – in exchange for a greatly-increased social wage obtained through increased company tax. This strategy was deemed essential for building working class solidarity and unity in Sweden and Germany.

Such a strategy would require changes in the trade unions. We have no history of wage solidarity in SA. The organisational structures of unions and federations do not favour strong centralised bargaining, nor do our collective bargaining forums. It is also not clear that wage solidarity is possible in an economy which – unlike Germany's or Sweden's – consists of such a mixture of First World, NIC, and Third World elements.

But failure to adopt such a strategy will continue to place centralised bargaining under strain. It will also create increasing strain within the trade union movement between different sectors and layers of workers, and large numbers of the lowest paid will probably remain unorganised.

Now is the time for a major debate within the trade unions on wages policy. It is a debate that will confront unions with difficult problems – but they are problems which will refuse to go away.

Movement towards more equal wage structures cannot of course be achieved without state support – in the form of tax structures, provision of services, bargaining systems, and a broader movement towards a more egalitarian incomes policy.

Will the ANC government, locked into the consumption partens of the old regime, have the political will and courage to challenge the real elite? That is one of the great questions of this period.



Karl von Holdt

SOUTH AFRICAN
LABOUR
BULLETIN

Vol 18 No 4 September 1994

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Cover photo: Apprentices at Benoni Training Centre (William Matlala)



**Left: NUMSA's Bethwell Maseramule and COSATU's Langa Zitha
Top: Independent Magazines Group's Olive Khoza and Speak's Boitumelo Mofokeng**

20 years old! SA Labour Bulletin cocktail party celebrates two decades of the journal



Marketing consultant Jerry Swanepoel and COSATU's Jayandra Naidoo



Top: *COSATU's Zwelinzima Vavi addresses guests*
Right: *Eddie Webster founder member of SALB Editorial Board, addresses guests*
Bellow: *Faith McDonald of Bilateralism Project Frans Barker of the NMC and Wolfgang Streeck, international guest*



'Participative management' alive and kicking at PG Bison

I am responding to the article, "Co-determination vs co-option", and the editorial in the *SA Labour Bulletin*, (Vol 18 no 1, 1994).

The editorial said: "The PG Bison case, for example, shows how illusory a consensus built on worker participation may be. The PG Bison experiment was seen by many as exemplary – yet it collapsed."

My perception is that the Participative Management scheme is alive and kicking at our company. Most of our workers are shy and some are old. They do not challenge management to fight for their rights and rely on the shopstewards to fight for them.

The shopstewards at PG Bison must be strong to fight for workers rights. We are not co-opted by anyone. We are strong, even in our townships, where we are leaders.

The collapse of the scheme should be reported to the media by us, the workers at PG Bison. People must give a true reflection of what is happening within PG Bison and interview all the branches on a national basis instead of only giving the negative side of the story.

Our achievements through participative management include:

Decision making – PG Bison, PPWAWU, UWUSA and NUMSA have agreed to have a task force or group of

eight full-time shopstewards (nationally), four union officials and company representatives to forward the terms of reference for decision-making rather than influencing the decision after it is taken by the shareholders.

In-a-Groups are functioning in other operations but not in all our plants due to different reasons from both workers and management. This can happen properly if the union commits itself to over-seeing whatever is being done at PG Bison.

Literacy – We have elected qualified teachers to do the job for us and the majority of our members have gone through these classes. We did encounter problems where some people felt belittled when taught how to read and write as adults. In other branches, there are those who are always negative about everything.

Values – We support and commit ourselves to our governing constitution, as PG Bison did in 6 June 1994. We know and understand them, even if there are problems about some individuals not wanting to change, but we have set a pace in motion. This belongs to us at P G Bison and to the community at large.

Job Grading – All trade unions and PG Bison management have agreed on a job grading system presented by Comrade Alister Machin of COSATU

on 7 June 1994. We also agreed that the eight full-time shopstewards, four officials and company representatives will be trained equally and fairly by COSATU.

Restructuring – This was imposed on us as workers but we managed to have a moratorium for three months. It was negotiated with the union. Some jobs were saved. Others were lost willingly by our members and the non-unionised workers who applied for the voluntary redundancy package which was negotiated with us.

Our former Chief Executive Officer, Leon Cohen, said: "All those who are positive and moving forward in the real South Africa. Now all we have to do is join hands and work together for our future success."

I am proud to work for this company without fear. People must start focusing on the good and stop exaggerating the bad.

Peace in our land!
Joseph Sabelo Mthembu,
Chairperson, PPWAWU
Wits Branch; and a
full-time shopsteward at
PG Bison

Response: Participation not a reality

We welcome Comrade Mthembu's discussion of our report and Karl von Holdt's editorial.

In our report we argued that while participatory management at PG Bison has brought certain important victories for workers, the plant level structures of joint decision-making have largely collapsed. There may be isolated plants where such structures (In-a-Groups) still operate, but in the company as a whole, worker participation in decision making is not a reality. It became clear during our visits to plants throughout the country and in our regular discussions with shopstewards, that old hierarchies and authority structures continue to dominate worker's experience.

However, the notion of participation does open up new possibilities for workers. PPWAWU has been able to use these to win demands around training, grading and union facilities. Some of these arose out of the negotiations following the study we conducted for the union.

The fact that this study and the subsequent negotiations could take place at all, was in itself testimony of PG Bison's openness to union participation as well as the strength of workers in the company. We believe that it is important to acknowledge the victories at PG Bison, but at the same time it is necessary to expose the shortcomings in order to move forward.

Finally, we wish to point out that the article was

submitted to both PPWAWU and PG Bison management before being published and that both accepted the contents of the article.

Lael Bethlehem, Sakhela Buhlungu, Owen Crankshaw and Caroline White.

Dear Comrade

I don't think Sakhela Buhlungu gives sufficient prominence to the politics behind the problem of the brain drain. (*Labour Bulletin, Vol 18 no 3*) It is true that he speaks of the loss of 'vision'. But he ends his analysis with an (implicit) acceptance of trade unionism as a mere career option for people with marketable skills and in pursuit of self-enrichment.

This change expresses the dramatic demobilisation of 'struggle' politics that has occurred in the past year or so. The struggle for socialism seems to have been abandoned even before state power has been achieved by the would be revolutionaries. Hence the need to make trade unionism 'more attractive', if it is not to lose even more of its most able personnel and if it is to stand any chance of attracting new talent.

In my view (which is informed by 20 years' experience of the British trade union movement),

trade unions denuded of radical politics have no chance of competing for the brightest and best personnel. The struggle to revitalise COSATU must therefore be by the struggle to regain the primacy of the socialist paradigm. The trade union movement of the 70s and 80s was superbly rich in human talent. The strength of that period of political purpose meant it had no difficulty attracting and rereplenishing itself with the cream of human talent even though it offered death, imprisonment and banning in exchange for appalling pay and a 24 hour working day.

I don't disagree with the need to improve the pay and conditions of trade union officials. But if the struggle is against class divided societies, regard must be had not of what bosses pay themselves and their hired guns but of what they pay the workers. I have no neat formula to offer in determining precise pay levels. My point is that socialism cannot be built by those privileged by capitalism. The pay and fringe benefits of trade union officials need to reflect this general reality.

COSATU needs to remobilise for socialism. Success on this front, I confidently predict, will simultaneously herald victory in the battle against the drain brain.

*Jeff Rudin
Simondstown*

Don't change a winning formula!

SA Labour Bulletin survey

By DEANNE COLLINS

The *SA Labour Bulletin* is a unique publication which provides hardcore and up-to-date information on labour issues.

This is the opinion of corporate subscribers and policy-makers.

In the last issue of the *Bulletin* we reported on our survey of trade union readership. The *Bulletin* is also read by numerous other groups, including industrial relations managers and policy researchers.

Our second survey, conducted on our behalf by CASE

(Community Agency for Social Enquiry) concentrated on these readers. CASE researchers conducted 40 interviews,

half with corporate subscribers and half with policy decision-makers in state institutions, political parties, NGOs and research institutes.

Participants in the survey were asked :

- are they reading and/or using the *Bulletin*?
- what do they think of the format and content?
- what suggestions do they have for improvements?
- does the *Bulletin* carry enough information on issues relevant to policy-makers?

The study also looked at the role of the *Bulletin* in the context of the post-election changes in the country.

Who they are

Readers surveyed are mainly white men in their 40s. Most have a high level of education. The majority have a post-graduate degree. Apart from the *Bulletin*, they also read a wide variety of industrial relations publications. Their most popular newspaper is *Business Day*.

What they like

'Red Eye' is the most popular feature. This is followed by 'Profile' and the

'Labour law update'. Readers read the two-page briefings, labour notes and the international feature regularly.

The most popular topics are COSATU policy, the National Economic Forum (NEF), critiques of the labour movement and the government, as well as the relationship between the ANC and the labour movement.

Substantive reports are preferred. Corporate readers find the brief reports more useful, because of constraints on their time. Readers like articles on new topics or that shed new light on issues, especially concerning current affairs.

Readers feel that through the *SA Labour Bulletin* they gain a "privileged" insight into the workings of the labour movement.

This is especially true for corporate

SOUTH AFRICAN
**LABOUR
BULLETIN**

subscribers, who feel that the *Bulletin* gives them "the other side of the story".

These subscribers do not necessarily want the *Bulletin* to become more neutral – one reader summed it up as follows: "I don't want it to be more objective, I want it to be subjective – that is why I buy it."

Dislikes

Some readers see the *Bulletin* as biased, especially towards COSATU. The views of FEDSAL and NACTU are not sufficiently represented. It was noted, however, that this is also the consequence of COSATU being the biggest federation.

Some feel the *Bulletin* is too political. Three of the people interviewed said it was "too red"!

There were also criticisms of the overall layout, too much material on a page, cheap paper and lack of colour. But the readers said that if the *Bulletin* couldn't afford to improve this they would not stop buying it.

Content

No-one sees the content as dull – one corporate reader said "sometimes I think, jeez, who wrote this – how dare they say this!" While some felt the content is a bit predictable, on the whole it is seen as thought-provoking, relevant and useful.

Readers were asked whether they thought the *Bulletin* should change to a magazine format. Thirty eight out of the 40 interviewed thought the *Bulletin* should remain a journal. A corporate subscriber summed it up: "It is a successful publication, it has got a good profile and it is a journal of standing ... from my point of view I wouldn't change a winning formula."

The majority of policy makers (14 out of

20) feel the *Bulletin* does not carry enough information on policy matters. They would like to see the *Bulletin* tackle macro-economic issues (for example structure of the workforce, white papers on affirmative action and collective bargaining, national policy concerns such as the RDP) and practical economic issues (for example job creation schemes, education, training, technology, human resources, pension funds, labour market policy).

The *Bulletin* is seen as useful for industrial relations and research work and providing an understanding of labour relations and trade unions, but less useful in terms of policy decisions and understanding management's aims and objectives.

The role of trade unions

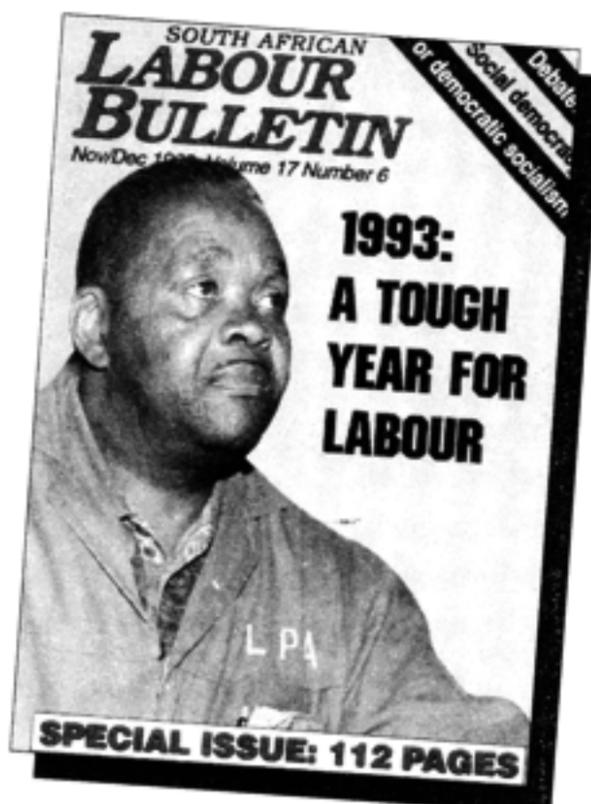
Readers were also asked their views on the role of trade unions in economic decision-making.

Almost all respondents agreed that trade unions should be involved in labour issues within companies, the drawing up of a national industrial relations policy, the drafting of a national education and training policy, national economic policy and wage issues. Most agreed that trade unions are legitimate representatives of employees. However, only half thought that trade unions should be involved in investment decisions.

The 'new' South Africa

Some readers feel the *Bulletin* should remain the same, but should concentrate particularly on the relationship between government and labour. Most agree the *Bulletin* should broaden its outlook, while remaining highly critical.

Above all, readers feel the *Bulletin* must remain independent and not protect the new government. ☆

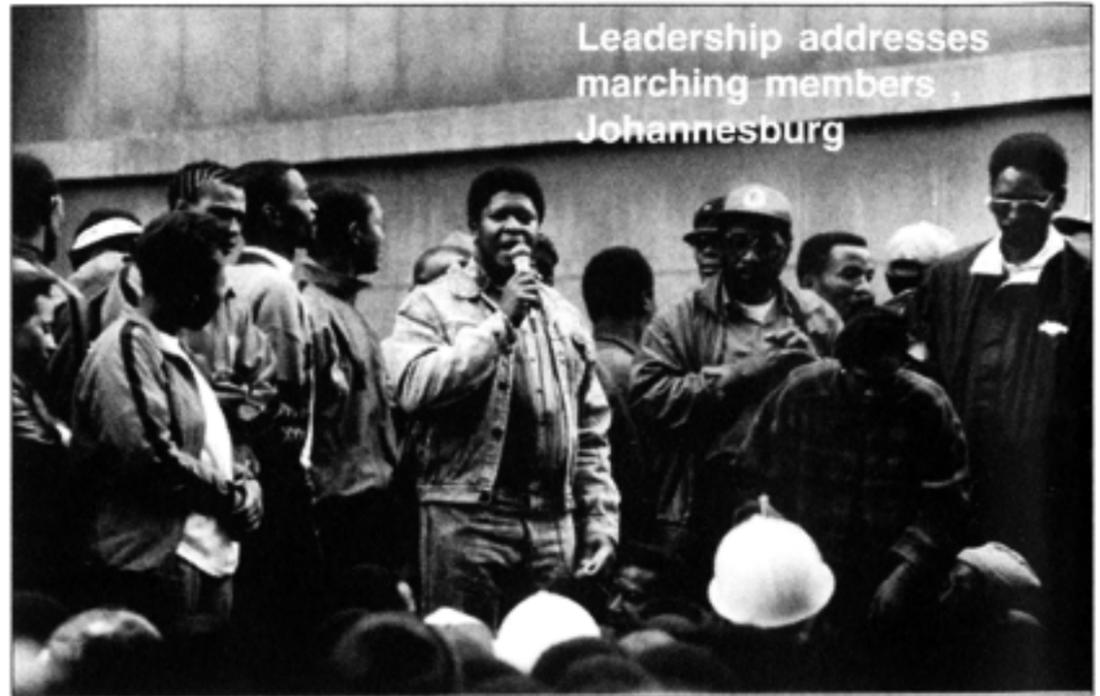


Unfinished business in the engineering sector

Wage negotiations in the steel and engineering industry were marked by deadlock and a threat of strike action driven by the two biggest regions of NUMSA, Wits East and Wits West. NUMSA, CWIU and MEWUSA reached deadlock with employers on two issues: the final offer (9% against the union demand for 12%), and the demand by employers from Border and Natal that their regions be exempted from the settlement so as to negotiate lower rates.

According to Bethwell Maserumule, regional secretary of NUMSA Wits East region, members were unhappy at the course of negotiations and angered by employers' final offer. This led to a mass march on SEIFSA's headquarters organised by the two Wits regions, accompanied by a "stayaway" in the engineering plants. The wave of militancy caught leadership unawares, says Maserumule. He believes it was sparked by the bitter Pick 'n Pay strike, a sense that there is "unfinished business" after the defeat of the 1992 strike, and a sense that the new government should mean a living wage.

Other regions of the union were keen to settle at 9%, however – some even called



Leadership addresses marching members, Johannesburg

on us to cancel the march". But, the Wits regions were reinforced by Natal and Border's rejection of separate regional deals. And so deadlock was declared.

After two days mediation, settlement was finally reached on 12 August. Terms of settlement included a 9,5% wage increase backdated to 1 July; no exemption for regions, but individual employers in those regions may apply for exemption to the industrial council; expedited exemption procedures for small employers; agreement that a framework document for productivity bargaining will be negotiated by the end of the year.

SEIFSA believes the agreement shows "increasing awareness of the need for flexibility in wage arrangements" – especially for small business and those in financial difficulties.

NUMSA's Chris Loyd says

the union is glad exemption procedures have been tightened up, and that employers will have to make our a serious case for exemption – particularly as the agreement provides for arbitration if no agreement is reached at the IC.

Maserumule believes increase is much smaller than could have been won. "The failure of our union to campaign cost our members a better deal." He also believes the commitment to agreement on a "productivity framework is "very dangerous" Negotiators will not have a mandate because there has been insufficient internal debate.

Maserumule argues for "proper campaigning" and "creative strategies" in the engineering sector. It seems "unfinished business" may rear its head again - both within NUMSA and in next years' negotiations.

(Karl von Holdt)

SACTWU and clothing employers have agreed to establish a single industrial council for the whole country by next year.

Up until now, the union has had to bargain at five regional industrial councils. This year, wage increases were negotiated at a national bargaining forum. A committee has been set up to work on the constitution of the national council.

Wage parity will be investigated by another sub-committee. While this year's negotiations brought the wages in the different regions closer, areas such as the Eastern Cape and OFS/Northern Cape are still way out of step with the rest of the

Bargaining breakthrough in the clothing industry

What a machinist in the clothing industry will earn from 1 July 1994

| Region | Old Wage | New Wage |
|------------|----------|----------|
| Natal | R240,50 | R265,50 |
| W.Cape | R240,00 | R263,00 |
| Tvl | R224,50 | R247,50 |
| E. Cape | R218,20 | R240,50 |
| OFS/N.Cape | R185,90 | R204,90 |

country.

Another issue which will need to be addressed is the national council's jurisdiction over areas which have traditionally been excluded. These include areas such as Isithebe and Ladysmith in

Natal, where wages are notoriously low.

In this year's negotiations SACTWU achieved increases ranging from 9,25 to 10,4 % for its members. The increases are effective from 1 July 1994.

(Deanne Collins)

Mining disputes

This year's wage negotiations in the mining industry have been characterised by deadlocks, leading NUM to declare disputes, most of which have been referred to conciliation boards.

1. NUM and the Chamber of Mines reached agreement on wages and other conditions of employment after the deadlock was referred to the conciliation board. The parties settled at 10%.

When talks deadlocked the Chamber was offering a 9,25% on gold mines and 10% for collieries, as opposed to the union's demand of 11%. Fourty five gold mines and 24



coal mines, accounting for approximately 300 000 workers, were affected by the dispute.

Agreement was also reached on these issues:

- Unpaid paternity leave of three days per annum;
- Maternity leave: 15% of pay for three months;
- Funeral transport: management will pay for

the transportation of the bodies of dead workers to their home areas;

- Information on NUM membership: mine management will provide membership data to the union on a monthly basis.

NUM refused to negotiate any profit sharing schemes this year. The union's membership had raised objections in 1991 with the scheme, arguing that this caused problems for workers because management applied this selectively, thus sowing confusion and division amongst workers.

2. The dispute between De Beers and NUM has been referred to the conciliation board. NUM is demanding a 17% increase, whilst management is offering 8%.

Continued on page 13



New farmworkers union for COSATU

Farmworkers lay foundation for new union

About 80 farmworkers organised under three COSATU affiliates gathered in Johannesburg on 20-21 August to lay a foundation for a farmworkers' union. The workers are currently organised under FAWU, PPWAWU and SACTWU, with a combined membership of 40 000. The three unions have agreed to transfer their members to the new union.

One of the major decisions of the conference was that a farmworkers union should be launched in February next year, and a steering committee of six people, all of whom are workers was elected to oversee the process. A draft constitution was also adopted, subject to ratification by the launching conference. A final decision on the name will be

taken at the launching conference.

In an attempt to maximise workers' participation and input, the conference broke into four commissions dealing with campaigns, the establishment of the union, the constitution and servicing and recruitment.

Immediate priorities were identified as necessary for the successful launching of the union. These are the establishment of regional structures in accordance with the geo-political boundaries; stepping up recruitment in the OFS; as well as striving towards pulling in other independent farmworkers' unions into the process.

No decision has been taken yet on the number of organisers the union will have. However, PPWAWU

has six organisers for its forestry members, FAWU employs seven farm organisers, while SACTWU has one farm organiser. COSATU has allocated 30 delegates to farmworkers in the September congress. Motha said that 20 of the delegates will be workers and the rest officials. Although they will have speaking rights, they will not be allowed to vote, since the union has not yet been formed.

Delegates highlighted the repressive conditions under which they work. One worker pointed out that although farmworkers are now covered by the Agricultural Labour Act (ALA), other prohibitive regulations still apply on the farms. "The trespass act is still in place, thus limiting

access to farms for union organisers to recruit members and conduct other union business.”

Other delegates raised concerns about the shortage of organisers. Low wages, long working hours and lack of job security were also among the grievances raised.

The participation by workers in debates was impressive, especially with

regard to issues of working conditions and experiences learned on ways of organising under the many prohibitive regulations/laws.

Delegates at the conference displayed a determination to move fast in the direction of uniting under one union, indicating that there is a will among farmworkers to change their unsatisfactory situation.

Motha said NACTU's National Union of Farmworkers and another Western Cape-based independent union were invited to participate in the conference, but both failed to arrive. The determination showed by COSATU's farmworkers will be negated by divided organisations in the sector.

(Zolile Mtshelwane)

Continued from page 11

About seven diamond mines employing nearly 10 000 workers are affected.

According to the union, De Beers also rejected all the other demands for an improvement on working conditions.

3. About 20 000 Impala Platinum workers have reached deadlock over a demand for a 15% increase. Management is offering 6%.

The dispute also centres around other working conditions like maternity leave, sick leave, etc.

Since the old bantustan laws have not yet been changed, the union has not been able to apply for the conciliation board, as the former Bophuthatswana laws do not provide for this. The union has met with the premier of the North-West region to find a way of

addressing the dispute.

4. Rustenburg Platinum Mines and the union reached a settlement on wages after the dispute was referred to the conciliation board. The settlement is for an increase of between 8,5% for workers in higher categories and 8,8% for those in lower categories. The company also agreed to recognise one full-time shopsteward for each of its mines, as well as a 12 months income security for injured mineworkers. The agreement will only be applicable to NUM members.

5. About 15 000 Eskom workers embarked on an illegal strike ranging from one to three days at the end of June. The workers were demanding an increase of 15% across the board. The strike was settled at 9,5% for the highest paid workers, and 13% for the lowest paid. The new minimum will now be R1 450 per month, from the old one of R1 300. Agreement was also reached on a 40-hour working week.

(Zolile Mtshelwane)

| Inflation Monitor: May 1994 | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Area | Consumer Price Index (1990=100) | Annual rate of inflation (%increase over 1 year) |
| | May 1994 | May 1994 |
| Cape Town | 156,6 | 7,6% |
| Port Elizabeth | 153,7 | 7,6% |
| East London | <u>154,9</u> | <u>7,3%</u> |
| Durban | 151,4 | 7,8% |
| Pietermaritzburg | 156,2 | 7,1% |
| Witwatersrand | 154,0 | 7,2 |
| Vall triangle | 146,9 | 6,2% |
| Pretoria | 154,6 | 7,4% |
| Klerksdorp | 153,5 | 7,1% |
| Bloemfontein | 149,8 | 6,7% |
| OFS Goldfields | 154,3 | 5,9% |
| Kimberly | 155,3 | 6,6% |
| SOUTH AFRICA | 154,1 | 7,2% |

Source: Central Statistical Service

Is there a strike wave – or a wave of media hysteria? KARL VON HOLDT argues that the real issue is not strikes, but a crisis of workplace relations. The solution could lie in a reconstruction accord and workplace reconstruction councils.

“Strike wave” *time for a reconstruction accord?*



Is it really the workers who have “unrealistic expectations” - or is it the employers, economists, journalists and politicians who have become almost hysterical about the current “strike wave” in South Africa? Of course, these sober representatives of economic “reality” would never dream of toyi toying in the streets - but they have been dancing their own kind of war-dance against labour militancy, using their own kind of cultural weapons - the newspapers, business conferences and TV.

The NP called for “unambiguous choices” in favour of “stability and economic growth”. The DP joined the war dance with warnings that as a developing country, SA “cannot afford militant unions much longer.” Fear that labour will threaten “investor confidence” has even spread to the ANC - with leadership making statements in public and private that union actions were selfish, and would frighten investors away and undermine the RDP.

The core of the media message has been that strikes discourage investment; that workers wages are so high that SA industry

cannot be competitive; and that low labour productivity exacerbates this problem. Several reports have argued that “weak leadership” in the unions has contributed to the “strike wave”. In effect, workers and their unions are presented as the source of our economic problems.

This response to recent strikes reveals something of the dangers facing the trade union movement in the new SA. The situation calls for bold and creative responses - such as a national accord on reconstruction, and workplace codetermination.

Strike wave?

But before discussing these options it is necessary to ask more searching questions about current worker actions.

Firstly, are we seeing a wave of strikes that is really dramatically different from what has gone before? The Andrew Levy strike figures quoted in the press are taken over too short a period of time to be a reliable indicator of trends for the year. There *have* been a number of protracted wage strikes. Some sectors which settled for lower than

inflation increases over the past two or more years have declared disputes. And there have been a number of stoppages over racism and management control. This does not add up to something dramatically different especially if the big strikes by teachers, municipal workers, metal and health workers in 1993 and 1992 are recalled. Rather, we are seeing the dramatic response of employers and commentators who expected – unrealistically – something very different: that workers would forget their demands and forego action once a democratic government had been elected.

However, while the *number* of strikes is not yet dramatically different, there is a new tone. Workers want change in the workplace - change to match the political changes in the country. This mood is captured in the response of one metalworker to a negotiations report back by a union organiser: "Why are you talking about SEIFSA? SEIFSA was finished with apartheid. We don't want to hear about SEIFSA anymore!"

Secondly, are workers' wages and labour productivity the key obstacle to SA's competitiveness on world markets? There is no evidence that they are. The kind of figures that they are used to "prove" this is the real problem say nothing useful about causes or solutions (By Bethlehem and Makgetla on p ...).

Thirdly, has "weak leadership" contributed to the strikes that have taken place? Again, there is no evidence for this. In general, the volatile nature of SA industrial relations has meant that many strikes over the past decade have been driven from below. The fact that this has occurred in some strikes this year has more to do with specific dynamics than with a new or general trend.

Crisis of workplace relations

Strikes are not the problem, nor are high wages or weak leadership. The problem is the crisis of relations in the apartheid workplace. Strikes are simply a manifestation of this. The South African workplace is characterised by sharp inequalities of power, wealth and skill along racial lines. Decision-making is the

prerogative of mostly white managers. Management practices are highly authoritarian and often racist. Income differentials between workers, supervisors and managers are among the highest in the world. All of this creates an experience of extreme injustice at work - which accounts for workers' conviction that things must change.

The experience of injustice generates a culture of resistance – which contributes to low productivity and often low quality work. The SA workplace is notoriously unproductive and inefficient, a pressure cooker of racial and class antagonisms. It is not strikes or wage increases that pose a threat to investment - it is the underlying crisis of the apartheid workplace. And responsibility for this crisis does not rest with black workers - it rests with employers.

Wage militancy – a problem for unions

But militant wage strikes and their underlying causes are also a problem for the trade unions. Protracted and bitter strikes make companies even less productive. Militant wage strikes are an attack on economic injustice, but they are not a viable long term strategy. They will not arrest the decline of industry, they cannot bring economic justice, and they will not transform workplace relations. There is a limit to the kind of pay increases unproductive companies can afford.

Indeed, a strategy of militant wage strikes may increase the stratification of the working class - it is often the best organised workers in the bigger and wealthier companies that make real gains, while the rest fall back into real poverty. The auto and Pick 'n Pay strikes confirm this point.

World Bank representative Isaac Sam comes to broadly similar conclusions. In an article on the Bank's recent document, *Reducing poverty in SA*, he argues: "The key here is a broad social consensus as to the legitimacy and fairness of economic policies. Indeed, to suggest that labour should bear the brunt of adjustment through reductions in real wages is contrary to the substance and spirit of the document's message." (*Business Day* 15/8/94).

Furthermore, wage militancy without a strategic vision can provide labour's enemies with weapons to attack and marginalise unions, as has been seen over the past few months. Labour runs the danger of becoming politically isolated, of being seen (however unfairly) as an *obstacle* to development, rather than one of its driving forces.

Wage restraint is also not a viable option for the unions. Their members would reject it and it would result in serious internal conflict. More importantly, wage restraint on its own would not solve SA's economic problems. It would not solve the crisis of workplace relations which is the source for many of these problems. It would not overcome economic injustice. If precedent is anything to go by, wage restraint would simply see excess profits distributed to shareholders and senior management, squandered in financial or property speculation, or invested outside SA.

National accord

The workplace crisis and economic injustice confront the trade union movement with serious dilemmas. The only way out of the trap of wage militancy is a bold new strategy. Indeed, a bold new strategy may open up new opportunities.

A national accord on reconstruction and development may provide exactly the strategy the trade unions need. The problem cannot be solved only at the workplace level, or even at the level of the industrial sector. What is needed is a redistribution of power and resources away from the elite which dominates the economy towards the masses – in other words, a movement towards economic justice. A Reconstruction and Development Accord (RDA) may provide the vehicle for achieving this. An essential part of such an accord would have to be establishing the workplace rights and institutions which could help to overcome the crisis of relations in the workplace.

The parties to an RDA would have to include labour, government and business, as well as organisations representing communities and rural people.

An RDA could include the following elements:

- an incomes policy

- some price control and subsidies on basic consumer goods
- a proactive and socially regulated investment policy
- a national training and grading framework, such as that proposed by COSATU
- the establishment of "reconstruction and development councils" in each workplace with rights in legislation
- a targeting of resources into the most pressing areas (housing, education, health, rural development)
- an expansion of the social wage
- establishing a monitoring body to ensure that all elements of such an accord are implemented.

The primary aim of an incomes policy would not be to restrain the wages of black workers, but to provide some kind of framework for fair incomes for *all* South Africans. This implies a redistribution of income from the highest paid (company directors, managers, senior state officials and the middle classes in general) towards the lowest paid. This could take place through increased taxes on the higher paid, an expanded social wage, minimum wage legislation and so on. Such a policy may mean wage restraint for higher-paid union members in the form of inflation indexed wage increases, and real wage increases for the lower paid members. An incomes policy of this sort would require centralised industrial bargaining in all industrial sectors.

Regulation of investment presents some of the most difficult problems, but it would be an essential component of an RDA. An accord will only hold if it is clear that the benefits of economic growth were going towards meeting the basic needs of the people. A variety of instruments for regulating investment could be explored, ranging from wage-earner funds on the Swedish model, or profit-sharing with the profits shared going into RDP funds, to active credit policies on the part of the state.

The accord would have to set reasonably clear targets for where investment and increased tax flows would be directed, so that its effectiveness could be monitored.



Crisis in workplace relations

Workplace councils

An RDA could provide the basis for a redistribution of power and resources at the national level. A similar process needs to take place in the workplace if the crisis of relations is to be resolved. The only way to do this is through some form of codetermination. Indeed, codetermination is implicit in many union demands over the past few years - demands for an end to unilateral restructuring, demands for access to company information, etc.

But codetermination – like other social policies – cannot simply be imported as a ‘model’ from other countries. South Africa needs to develop its own form of codetermination, built on South African traditions of struggle, and suited to the South African situation. ‘Reconstruction and development councils’ could be a viable form of codetermination in SA.

Why ‘reconstruction and development councils’? The RDP is the hegemonic political, economic and social programme in SA. Reconstruction and development councils would have legitimacy in the eyes of workers

and employers. They would link negotiations inside the workplace, over productivity, affirmative action and training, to the broader goals of the RDP. Thus codetermination negotiations need not be confined to narrow workplace concerns.

Corporate social responsibility funds, for example, should be on the agenda of such councils. The contribution of company and workers to the RDP could be discussed. Reconstruction and development councils could point workers towards the need to make and deepen linkages with community organisations.

We have examples in our own history that could transform the relation of workers - and companies – to the RDP and the community. In 1990 workers at Mercedes Benz negotiated with management to build a car for Nelson Mandela. Workers provided their labour free, and management provided the components. What is to prevent workers throughout SA from negotiating similar deals with their employers?

Workers at cement factories and brickyards, for example, could contribute one

days labour per month, matched by employers' provision of raw materials. The product of that day would then be contributed to the RDP. Workers and management could jointly present their contribution to a particular community. This would be a way of harnessing the political energy and idealism of the struggle against apartheid, to the struggle for reconstruction – at the same time stressing the social use of what is produced in the factories. It would make a powerful contribution to transforming the apartheid workplace.*

If workplace reconstruction and development councils were to be effective, they would require enabling legislation. This could take the form of laying out the conditions under which councils should be established, and what their rights and powers are. The law should guarantee their rights to company information; to negotiation over company restructuring, work organisation and

productivity; and joint decision-making over affirmative action and corporate social responsibility projects.

Campaigning for an RDA

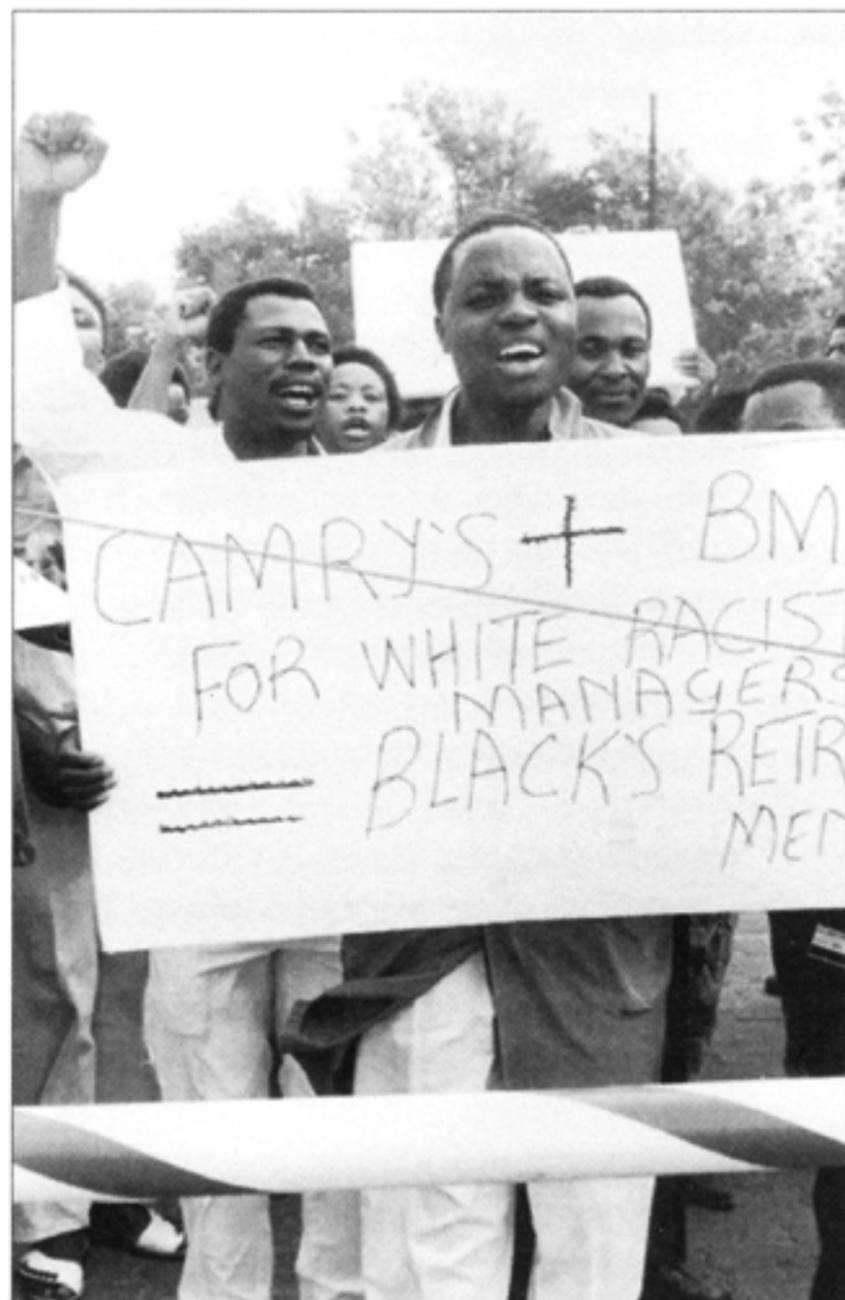
Clearly government support for an RDA and codetermination would be crucial to their success. Employers are certain to object to most of the ideas outlined above, and would put pressure on the government not to support them.

Only a concerted and broad-based campaign by the labour movement will place an RDA and workplace reconstruction and development councils on the agenda. Such a campaign could channel the energies and creativity of trade union activists into producing a real shift in the balance of forces. It would be a campaign for governing the workplace and the economy, not for ungovernability; a campaign for development, not resistance. A campaign such as this would enable the labour movement to present its perspective on how economic growth and economic justice can be achieved - and put labour's free marketeer critics on the defensive. If successful, such a campaign would once again place labour at the centre of change in SA. The trade unions could open up a new contestation over the central meaning of the RDP.

Could it succeed?

There are a number of obstacles to the success of a reconstruction and development accord.

- ❑ **Union members might not accept the degree of wage restraint and strike restraint that an accord would entail.** Wage militancy is the form of struggle that unionists know best. A reconstruction and development accord could only succeed with the active support of members. A campaign would have to be accompanied by an effective media and education programme within the unions to enable a full debate on the accord. The trade union

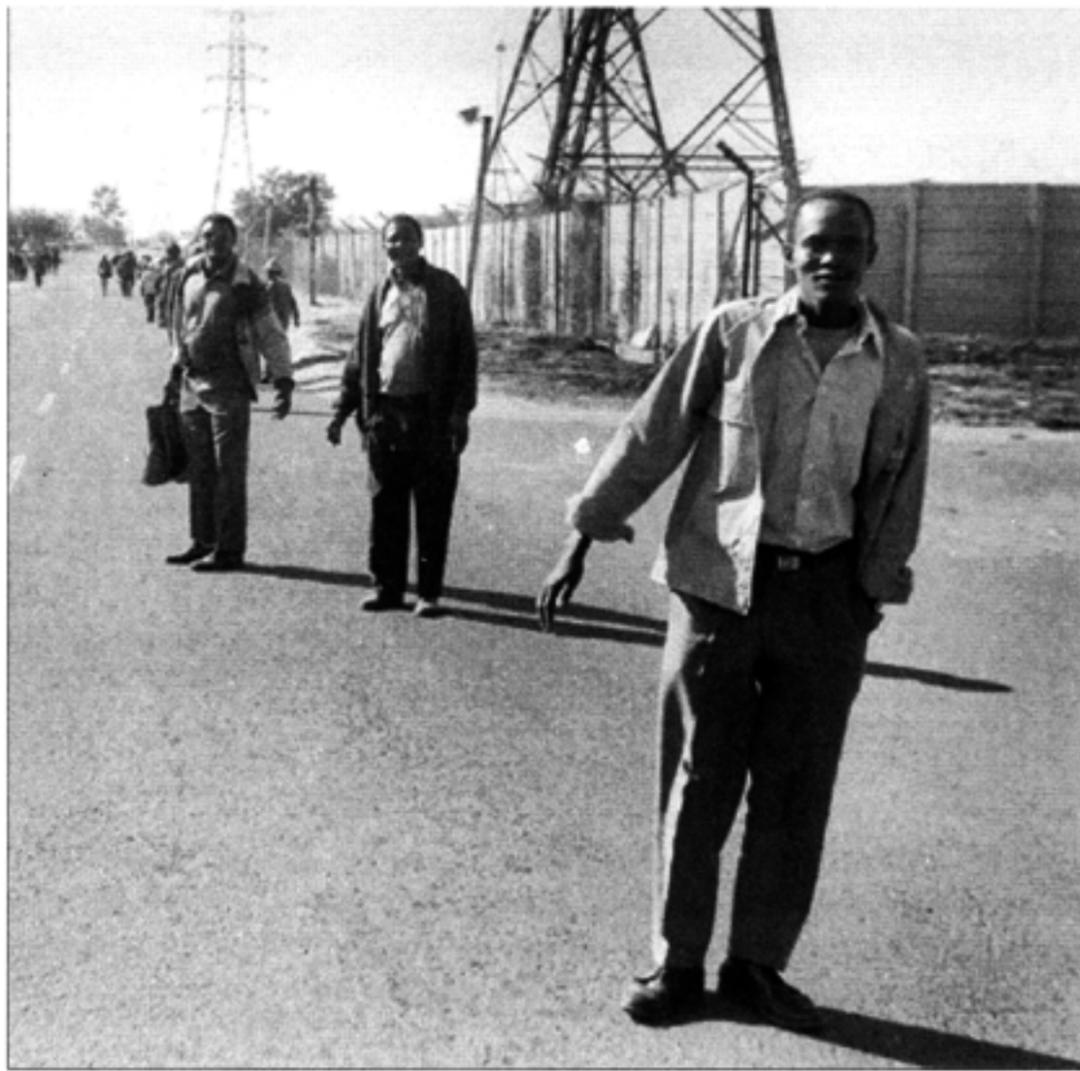


Camrys plus BMWs for white managers equals workplace crisis

* The NUM president has just made a similar call for workers and business to forego public holidays and donate the proceeds to the RDP

bargaining position could be debated and agreed by regional and national congresses to confirm mass support. If support was not forthcoming the project would have to be abandoned.

- **Does South Africa have the institutional capacity for such an accord?** The implementation of a complex agreement on incomes, prices, taxes, investment and state projects requires strong and capable institutions - both of the state and civil society. Current state institutions are corrupt and dedicated to other purposes. Employers' organisations are weak and cannot bind members. The trade union movement is not particularly coherent or centralised. These are disadvantages. However, institutions are built around projects, not in a vacuum, and an accord could stimulate institution building. The parties to an accord would have to carefully assess current institutional capacity, and tailor the accord to fit this. The agreement should not be so complex and all embracing as to invite failure. Elements can be added in future years, building on immediate success.
- Will the accord be implemented and monitored? One of the problems in the international experience of accords is that only those aspects that entail sacrifices on the part of labour are implemented, while aspects beneficial to ~~labour~~ ^{capital} are quietly shelved. There would have to be rigorous monitoring (noting the institutional problems referred to above) and the trade unions would have to keep campaigning around their concerns - with the threat of action and collapse of the accord if the agreement was not honoured.
- Would employers and government even



A long road to economic justice: auto strikes

consider the idea of an RDA?

This is a difficult question to answer. Most South African employers would reject the degree of social regulation entailed in an accord. But the trade unions have achieved extraordinary things in the past - the democratisation of the National Manpower Commission, the formation of the National Economic Forum, the acceptance of the RDP by virtually all social forces. There is no absolute reason why a broad-based campaign for an accord should not win wide social and ANC support, and increase the pressure on business to start negotiating. The NEF already provides a focus for such a campaign.

At the end of the day there is probably no alternative to a national accord and workplace codetermination for ending the stalemate in the workplace. It is a stalemate that will persist - and that in the end may well undermine the RDP - until the crisis in relations is resolved. Employers need to be pressurised to see that.

Trade unions too need to confront this reality. Now is the time for bold strategies. The alternative is militant wage strikes and political isolation. *R*

❑ Overpaid and underworked?

Wages and productivity in South African manufacturing

By LAEL BETHLEHEM and NEVA MAKGETLA*

“Wages are high when set against productivity, against what...Edward Osborne once called a “less than demonic work ethic”

Finance Week August 11-17 1994

“We have the most expensive, least productive labour force in the developed world”

The Star 2 August 1994

“South Africa’s workers and managers in the manufacturing sector earn more than their international counterparts, contributing to the country’s lack of competitiveness”

Sunday Times 7 August 1994

“ We need a strong economy – and that requires labour to tone down its wage demands”

The Star 2 August 1994

“The South African labour force in most fields does less work for more money than workers in competing nations”

Sunday Times 7 August 1994

Much of the press clearly believes that South African workers are underworked and overpaid. They claim that South African manufacturing workers:

- ❑ earn more than workers in other countries
- ❑ are unproductive because they ‘do too little work’
- ❑ should practice wage restraint in order to allow the economy to grow.

Our research suggests that these claims

are misleading. We can show this by answering three questions:

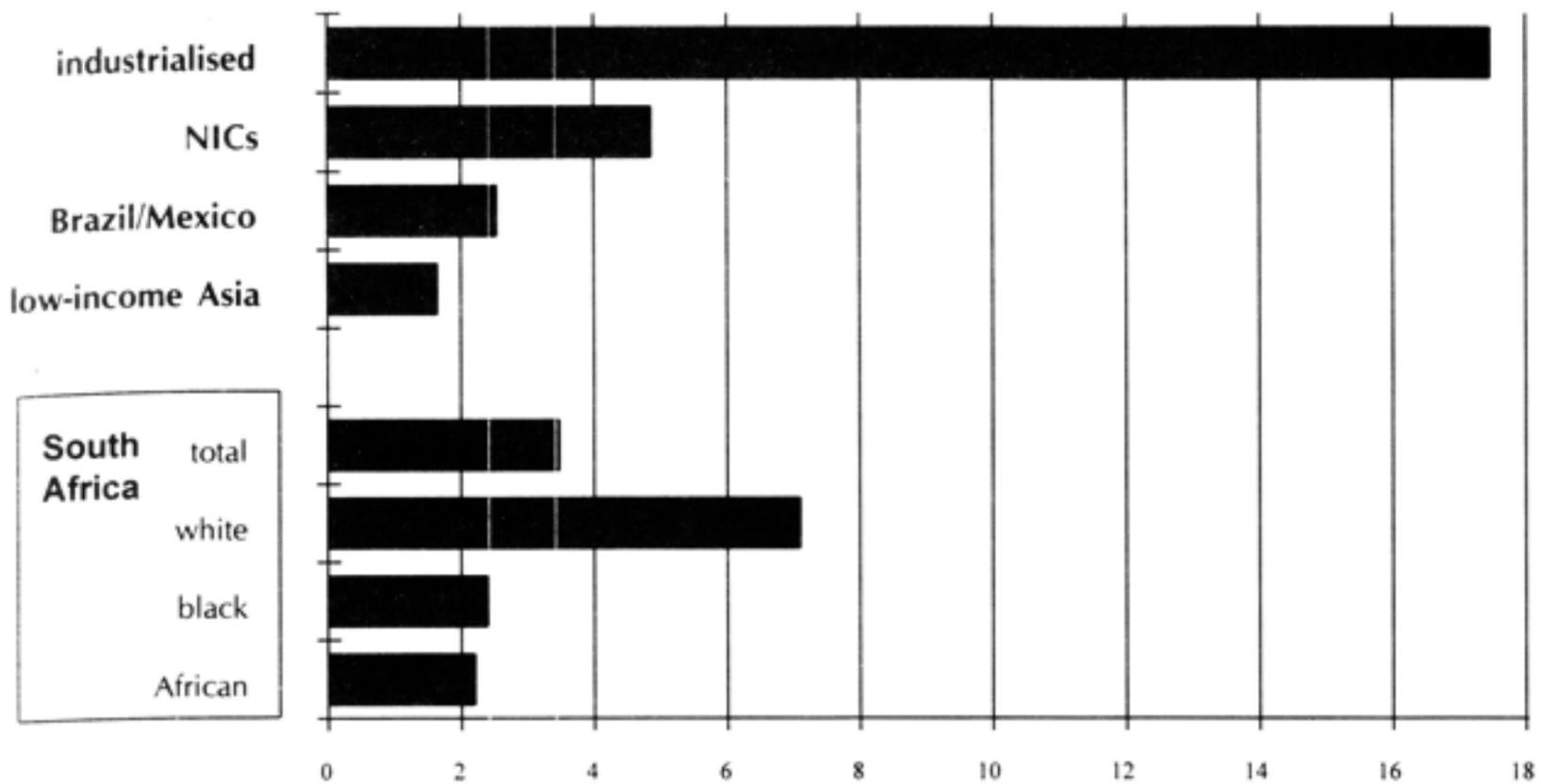
1. Do South Africans employed in manufacturing earn more than their counterparts?

The average earnings of South Africans employed in manufacturing are not high on an international scale. Graph 1 shows (page 57) that:

- ❑ Average hourly earnings in South African manufacturing (including wages and salaries) are less than one quarter of the average paid by the top ten developed countries and lower than in the newly industrialised countries like South Korea and Taiwan.
- ❑ These averages include the earnings of both workers and managers. The National Productivity Institute has recently estimated that of the average earnings, 60% of the total is made up of salaries (white collar workers and management) and only 40% is made up of wages (blue collar workers). This can also be demonstrated by looking at earnings on a racial basis since most whites employed in manufacturing are supervisors and managers while most Africans are shop-floor workers. The graphs show that the average white earnings in manufacturing are indeed high by international standards, but that black earnings are low. **Since trade unions largely organise black workers, it is impossible to maintain the**

* Bethlehem and Makgetla are researchers at the National Labour and Development Institute (NALEDI) linked to COSATU

Earnings in Manufacturing in South Africa compared to other countries



Notes: NICs include Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Portugal and Singapore; low-income Asia includes China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines

Sources: Calculated from, CSS, *Labour Statistics 1993*; CSS, *Labour Statistics: Statistical Release P0200*, March 1993; figures on wages in other countries supplied by the NPI, based on DRI McGraw-Hill Morgan Stanley Research.

U.S. dollars an hour

NALEDI
NATIONAL LABOUR & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

argument that unions are 'pricing South Africa out of the market'.

2. Do South African workers 'do too little work'?

Labour productivity is not simply the result of how hard workers work. Most measures of 'labour productivity' only tell us how much is produced in relation to the number of people employed. But productivity is really about how efficiently we use our human, raw material and capital resources. It depends then, partly on decisions made at the national level and partly on those made at plant level. Since workers in South Africa have very limited influence over decision making at either level, it is difficult them to have more than a passing effect on productivity.

Workers could play a role in improving productivity if they could influence decisions ranging from investment plans to eliminating waste and defects in the plant. **But until workers are given more influence, their contribution to productivity improvements will be limited.**

3. Are higher wages bad for the economy? The countries which have grown rapidly in the last few years are those with a more

equal distribution of income. Indeed, very low wages can reduce productivity and limit workers' ability to buy goods. In any case, as Graph 2 shows, overall earnings have been shrinking as a proportion of the value of what is produced in manufacturing over the last twenty years.

The share of African earnings has grown, partly as a result of the promotion of African workers to more skilled positions. This growth however, has not pushed up the total, since white earnings have declined as a percentage of the overall value of production. These trends have helped to overcome the enormous distortions in incomes introduced by apartheid. **These figures suggest that African earnings in manufacturing could continue to rise without pushing up the overall wage bill.** Even if the earnings of all race groups rise to some extent, it will still be some time before the levels common in the 1970s will be reached.

This brief article highlights some of the key points in the debate about wages and productivity. NALEDI will be doing further research on this issue in the coming months. ☆

□ Anglo American's Leslie Boyd speaks bluntly on
unions, wages, investment



From left to right: Leslie Boyd, Michael Spicer, Karl von Holdt, Lael Bethlehem

Lael Bethlehem and Karl von Holdt interview LESLIE BOYD, deputy chairman of Anglo American Corporation and chairman of Anglo American Industrial Corporation, and MICHAEL SPICER, group public affair's consultant to AAC.

S ALB: *What are the prospects for industrial growth in the new South Africa.*

Boyd: Foreign investment is extremely important to create the jobs we need, to create the extra wealth, to get the economy going. In order to attract that investment, and indeed to encourage more investment by South African companies, you need an environment that is totally conducive to investment.

The first priority is stable government. President Mandela is setting an excellent example. They haven't rocked the boat, they haven't shot from the hip, they haven't done too many foolish things or tried to correct everything in a great hurry. But the violence

that still exists in parts of the country is not conducive to investment. It is a top priority to reestablish law and order fully.

Turning to economic issues, the one thing that has to be established is that we are going forward on the basis of a free market economy. We have to have low inflation. We need a climate of low taxation. For the foreign investor, the principle interest is company tax. Company tax in this country is still not low enough – it is not competitive with other countries that are looking for foreign investment. At 35% we have made a lot of progress, but it has to come down to below 30%. While I agree with the principle of STC, at 15% it was fair but at 25% it has gone too far*.

Foreign investors do not invest in the country because they are Father Christmas. If you tax the hell out of them they will go to Taiwan. Personal tax also needs to be kept low. In South Africa we have the financial rand and we have exchange control. There will be no major investment in this country – I think I can say that with complete confidence – until we remove exchange control, certainly for foreigners.

There are enormous opportunities to privatise in this country. Privatisation gives the message to the world that you are serious about a free market economy, so it is an absolute must. The proceeds from privatisation can be the basis for the RDP funding.

I think the chance for growth in this country is extremely high. Apart from possibly taxation and the current wage negotiations, which are definitely going to impact on the inflation rate, the investment environment is moving in the right direction. The world economy is recovering strongly so we have got an external environment which is going to pull us along whether we like it or not.

This country is in a fortunate position, because of the hard core of mineral wealth which gives us a very solid base of exports.

* STC is a tax on dividends; the intention is to encourage companies to reinvest profit rather than distribute it to shareholders – ed

We're working from that base of mineral exports – we're trying to do it in our own way in our group – we have to add value and get into industrial products and gradually increase the export potential of this country.

SALB: What in your view is the impact of strikes and wage settlements on the investment environment?

Boyd: I am not worried about strikes. The first of July is the negotiating period – there is nothing unusual. What I am worried about is the way in which the wage settlements are being driven. That could and will have – if it goes too far – a negative impact on our future growth. It's vital to hold wage increases down so that they bear a relation to the inflation rate. It is not just the business community, but also the World Bank and the IMF, that say your wage increase should be held around the inflation rate. You can go up 1 or 2% above that – as long as you get some productivity improvement. The auto industry dispute is already at 10% which is 2,5% above inflation. That is too high already.

SALB: There is a strong argument that wages in South Africa are not really the source of inflationary pressure or productivity problems. The real problem is a crisis of relations in the workplace. A more productive mode of operating the workplace would make wages much less of an issue. Related to this is the question of income differentials across society. In South Africa the differentials are quite phenomenal, and that is a source of the frustration of workers going out on strike. A lot of the other areas you have pointed to – low personal tax, low company tax, privatisation – may be said to not address the very large income gap in South Africa. But without addressing that very large disparity in access to wealth and resources, you are not going to be able to say to unions that wages should be held down, or that productivity should be increased.

Boyd: One of the important elements of a free market system is the law of supply and



demand. You have got a small pool of skilled people and a large pool of unskilled labour. You have to pay more for skills and you pay less for labour. A worker today at the labouring level is elite in this country. For everyone that is in a job there is probably one outside that is not in a job. Unskilled labour has to recognise that there is no way that you can pay them wage rates that are way out of line with international competition.

SALB: What do you think of the union proposals for a high wage, high skill, high productivity industrial strategy?

Boyd: I can't think of an example in the world where higher wages have pulled up the economy. Actually higher wages depress the economy. In countries that had very high unemployment – Taiwan, South Korea – people accepted low wages and you got the economy going. You get high growth, and the economy pulls up the wages.

South Africa is different. This is a dual economy situation. It has a highly industrialised, almost world competitive sector, like our steel industry, the heavy

industrial sector. And then we have the rural economy. I am not suggesting that we take everybody who is in the first world part of the economy and drive their wages down to the level of the Chinese and Indonesians. We have got these wages and we have to live with them. What we have to do is to make sure that the increases are productive increases and inflation related.

But I am talking about a low wage strategy for the unemployed. I have been travelling to Asia for 22 years. Anglo American holds overseas investments in South East Asia – I happen to be the chairman of the company involved in that. One of our most recent investments is in a mini industrial conglomerate in Indonesia, called Mitra. Let me tell you about some of the businesses in that Indonesian conglomerate. They make takkies, golf shoes, golf clubs, leather handbags, stainless steel cutlery. Those workers earn a fifth of what our workers earn in similar industries in this country.

Those businesses started in Japan. When wages went up with economic growth they

moved to Taiwan. They moved to Korea. Now they are moving to Malaysia and Thailand. We want to be part of that world and we are not going to be part of that world if we say we have a high wage, high skills strategy.

You need low capital requirements to start these businesses. It is not a Columbus or an Alusaf – it is peanuts. They are labour intensive, they create jobs and they are export orientated. These are the businesses we need. The union needs to acknowledge that, and not force unionism on infant businesses. Let people take low wages, it is better than not having a job at all, and let's grow the economy.

I am arguing for a differentiated, much more flexible wage attitude by the trade unions.

SALB: It is generally acknowledged that we have a productivity problem in South Africa. What is your view on this?

Boyd: Productivity in South Africa is by and large low, although there are some industries that are almost world competitive. To understand productivity is very important. Let us take Columbus. We currently employ about 1 800 people at Columbus and they are currently producing 150 000 tons of stainless steel a year. By the time the expansion is complete we will be able to produce 600 000 per year. We will be able to do that with 1 900 people rather than 1 800 and that is a productivity improvement of four times. It will make us the most productive stainless steel company in the whole world. But in order to get there we are having to spend R3,5 billion. These are the issues in productivity.

I do not blame the workers for low productivity. I do not say we have got low productivity because of unions. Productivity is the job of management. Your best managers will get more out of the labour force than your bad managers. It is simply a question of management.

SALB: What do you think could drive productivity growth, sustained productivity growth, in South Africa?

Boyd: Determining productivity here is

what determines it anywhere in the world. If we are going to survive we have got to get our productivity up. You have to manage your business. Often unfortunately it means down-sizing and that is why you need strong economic growth because then it does not need down-sizing.

Spicer: It is skills as well, obviously we have a mutual commitment to training. We have also driven hard in this corporation to have productivity introduced into our wage settlements. We innovated first at Ergo and then elsewhere, the idea of productivity and profit sharing. This year we've been told by the union we don't want any of this productivity stuff, we just want a flat wage. We find that very difficult to handle.

Boyd: Look at almost any company in the Amic group and the growth the a number of non-white artisans since 1980 is phenomenal.



More than half of our artisans are non-whites. I have debates with my colleagues at Anglo about this, because I am not a top down man. I say until you have got black artisans bringing up families where the kid sees the father who is a fitter or an electrician, and he says 'gee my dad is really something and I am going to go one stage further, I am going to be an engineer'. Once you have got that solid artisan class you can really build. You can't take it from the top and push it down. Affirmative action, let us try it, but we know it fails everywhere. If you look at the artisan issue we have made enormous strides.

SALB: There is still a real question

about productivity. Unions have put their eggs into the skills basket and say skills, shopfloor skills, not only artisan skills are going to drive productivity growth. The unions are also talking about new forms of work organisation. What do you think of changing work organisation?

Boyd: We use the Kaizen* system in many of our companies now. Samcor is a classical example. We have Kaizen groups all over the plant made up of supervision and workers and they sit down regularly and say how can we do the job better.

It is working, the thing that is not working is the economic growth to drive the market. Business does not start with productivity, it does not start with production, it does not start with investment – it starts with the market and opportunities. Business is driven by the market, it is not driven by managers or trade unions. Unless you grow that market all this other stuff means nothing. How do you drive that market? You do it by creating an economic environment.

SALB: Getting greater worker participation at the plant level will not easily be achieved through the Japanese system because we have a strong and militant trade union movement.

Boyd: There is no co-determination in Indonesia or in Malasia. There are no trade unions! I strongly believe that as management our business is to manage. Our entrepreneurs at the end of the day will drive the economy.

SALB: Trade unions often criticise the quality of South African management. What is your view?

Boyd: You can't generalise. It is variable. I think South African management can hold their heads up in any country in the world. We have some excellent management in this country. That does not mean that every manager is a great manager, and we are a bit short on numbers.

SALB: Earlier when you talked about

productivity you did say a key problem is management, that you were not blaming unions or workers.

Boyd: I meant productivity is the job of management. That is why I like the Kaizen system, because that is what they tackle all the time. But if you do not get the market to grow you can forget productivity.

SALB: You have talked about freeing up the markets and the free market economy, privatisation and so on. But in the light of state involvement in the Columbus project, I imagine that you favour a role for the state in investment decisions together with the private sector. Would you like to see the state continuing to play a role in certain kinds of investments in the new South Africa, and what kinds of investments?

Boyd: I do not believe in permanent state subsidies. I do believe in kick start support, infancy industry protection – tax holidays, flexible and imaginative schemes. But permanent subsidies to maintain industries that should not be there, no.

Spicer: We do not believe in sectoral targeting. There is a distinction between the circumstances here and Japan. There you can have a MITI (ministry of International Trade and Industry – *ed*) drawing on the absolute elite of the civil service, who happen to also have gone in and out of industry. They have the same world view, they have a technical understanding. And their planning works because it is indicative, it is not directive. It can make recommendations, but business can and does say sorry we do not accept it if they wish to. It would be deeply unattractive to us to try to replicate a MITI model here with people who do not have experience, who believe in central planning and targeting. We can start at the NEF level where we jointly discuss these things and from there we can build.

SALB: Amic is moving into a project with Daewoo from South Korea to establish a TV tube plant. There is news about Ford wanting to reinvest in Samcor. Why do these companies

* Kaizen or "continuous improvements" refers to Japanese forms of worker participation, eg quality circles – *ed*



want to invest here? Is it with the expectation of a dramatic growth in local consumer demand, or is it as a platform for exporting?

Boyd: There are a number of reasons. All of them say that here is an immediate market of 40 million people. Here is a country with first world infrastructure, not just roads, telecommunications – it's got a financial sector which is the equal of the world. You can come here and understand the culture. So SA is the gateway to Africa. That is the general view.

Take the Daewoo case. We said the next wave of investment has to come from the East. We got to work on the big Japanese and Korean companies. Eventually Daewoo responded. We want to manufacture the colour picture tube together. What is driving that is the electrification programme. What is the first thing people buy when they have electricity? It is a TV. Daewoo says, with this electrification programme there is going to be a sure market for TVs, and it is going to be a growing market.

This is an infant industry. We have been

talking to the Board of Trade and Industry. We need seven years protection, and then we will go to GATT and we will fight the rest of the world. The wonderful thing about this plant that we are putting in is that there is no plant in South America to supply South America. So we see immediately – advised and driven by the South Koreans – a market over there. So it is not a simple process.

Ford says they have been here for 71 years. Why give up a market? Our brand name is well known. Ford was a number one seller in this country, and it will do that again, I have no doubt.

SALB: *But a lot of this runs counter to the free market. You are talking about protection, about a market which depends on electricity supplied by Eskom which is a state utility, and you are talking about disposable income so people can buy TVs. Internal wage levels cannot be driven down if you want a market.*

Boyd: I did not say that we should drive wages down. I am saying the people who do not earn any wages at all must accept low



wages. And Anglo American believes that Eskom should only be privatised in the long term, precisely because of its role in electrification.

SALB: How do you assess relations between labour and employers at the moment in South Africa?

Boyd: Relations are much better than the press would have us believe. I am a great believer in the shopfloor relationship. If you work in a steel works for example, the relationship is remarkable on the shopfloor. Even in the bad old South Africa. Obviously there are incidents, often racist incidents, that disrupt it. What concerns me most is that the leadership of the unions has gone into politics and there is a big vacuum. The shopfloor is saying that you guys are not looking after us. I don't think it is management that they are after at this point in time, I think it is the trade union leadership.

You should know a little bit about my background. I am a Scot and I have been here for 24 years. I come from a working class background. My father was in the steel industry, my grandfather was in the steel

industry. My other grandfather was a coal miner. I was brought up in a nice home and my father worked hard. I am not claiming to be deprived, I had a good education and I worked hard and I made some kind of progress.

Harold Wilson became Prime Minister and he nationalised the steel industry. The trade union grip on the country was such that we weren't working half the time, it was a disastrous period. The unions were so militant and strong, irresponsible. I said to myself I can't work for the state. I am three generations of steel maker, I want to stay in the steel industry, so I am going to leave Britain.

I don't want to see happen in South Africa what happened in Britain. Once you start to dig your way out of it, as Margaret Thatcher had to do, the pain and the grief was horrendous. The result is the trade union movement has been destroyed in Britain. I do not want to see the trade unions do that to this country. I actually believe in strong trade unions. But I believe in strong trade unions where the leaders lead and don't follow.

I sometimes worry about the leadership of

the trade unions here. In the Pick 'n Pay strike the workers lost R1 500 to gain R5 per month. It will take 25 years for the workers to get that back. In the car industry strike the half percent that separates them now is equivalent to R2,50 a week. A week on strike costs each worker R484 – it would take them 200 weeks to get back what they lost. So I say to myself there is something wrong with the leadership of the unions at the moment. They should be saying 'listen guys there is no logic in this anymore'.

SALB: Why don't you just pay them the extra 0,5%?

Boyd: I have told you what we have to do with wage increases – we have to keep them just that smidgen above inflation. I do not regard 10% plus as a smidgen. That is too much.

SALB: How do you see the NEF? Do you see any scope for a National Accord of some nature between labour, business and the state at the NEF? Is there any place in South Africa for workplace co-determination?

Boyd: We support the National Economic Forum. But in my view it is not a forum that should run the ministry of finance or the government. It's going to have its input. It's going to try wherever possible to achieve consensus. But it can never be a decision-making body.

Regarding codetermination in the workplace, if you look at Europe and South East Asia, which one has got the highest growth rate? South East Asia by a factor of three. Europe in many ways has lost its way and I have no doubt in my mind that the way to go is the Eastern way, the Kaizen way. I believe in democracy but I do not believe in democracy in the workplace. The managers have to manage. You have to have a decision maker, you have to have a leader. It is the same in the trade unions. That is what leaders are for. Leaders are for leading.

I like to consult, but at the end of the day the manager has to make a decision. So I like the Kaizen system. I do not like the European system. The reason I like the Kaizen system is that it gives you what this

country is going to need, which is high growth and the creation of a lot of jobs.

Spicer: We feel that the West German model has a big question mark behind it. It is clear that some things have become unbearable burdens on the performance of the economy. Secondly, codetermination will have to be earned in the sense that relationships mature. At the moment there are too many elements in dispute. One cannot end up immediately with codetermination. If we ever get there it will grow out of the improving relationship. You also have to be confident that it will not stifle the growth that we are looking for in new industries.

Centralised bargaining, industrial councils, we are always told that these are going to be flexible but the track record is of inflexibility and destruction of jobs. There is no evidence that we are going to produce new super bureaucrats who are somehow going to be light handed and light footed. So the prevailing view is sceptical.

SALB: In some industrial sectors task forces have been established to look at the future of that industry, usually when the industry is in crisis. Do you support bringing trade unions into strategic discussions about the future of industry at the sectoral level?

Boyd: I think the trade unions have an extremely important input. One has to define the objectives of these studies. Let us take the motor industry. If you only want to achieve affordability of motor cars then shut down the industry. Then the first question would be where are we going to get the foreign exchange to buy the cars? The second question is what are we going to do with the 250 000 people you have just put in the street? The objective has to be to protect foreign exchange, to protect some employment, and by all means try to get the price of cars down. Frankly, the proposals that have come out from the motor industries task group – the only thing they would achieve is affordability, because there won't be an industry by 2005. The input of trade unions is very important because they will recognise that protection of jobs is the key issue. ☆

Comment

'Conservative orthodoxy' is how one might best characterise the views of Leslie Boyd and Michael Spicer. Reduce the role of the state, limit wage increases, introduce quality articles and let management get on with managing – these are the essential ingredients for economic growth.

Boyd and Spicer show no inclination to think about the state as an agent and resource in facilitating productivity, competitiveness or industrial development; to entertain a broader analysis of incomes, productivity and inflation; or to consider new and more creative relations between unions and management. If these views of some of SA's most powerful business leaders are at all representative, they must set business and labour on a collision course as far as economic policy is concerned.

Our own various views on wages, productivity and codetermination are set out in other articles in this issue. Here we wish simply to comment to certain specific issues.

Firstly, Boyd and Spicer appear to have no answer to the need for substantial redistribution of wealth and power away from the elite which currently controls the economy.

The macro-economic policies they advocate on tax, inflation and privatisation would tend to preserve rather than reduce these disparities. Interestingly, there is more of a convergence with the views of labour on industrial policy. Far from endorsing an IMF – type free market approach (which they *do* support in relation to wages), Boyd and Spicer argue for various kinds of state support for infant industries and new projects, and support union involvement in formulating long term strategies for specific industries.

Secondly for Boyd the main factors in

increasing productivity are good management, technology and Japanese style 'worker participation' – which tends to bypass the union. Spicer adds the need for a "mutual commitment" to training, but there is no sense of the kind of investment in skills and training that the unions are calling for. Indeed, it seems that there is no role for trade unions beyond ensuring that wage settlements do not rise above productivity increases, and negotiating productivity-rewarding wage schemes.

These very different approaches to productivity suggest that there is more conflict than co-operation in store. Indeed, the length of the auto industry strike, when only half a percent separates the two parties, may be attributed to these underlying differences.

Thirdly, job creation. Boyd mounts a strong argument for a dual economy in which a low-wage no-union Malaysian or Indonesian – type manufacturing sector is established alongside the already resisting "first world" sector paying relatively high wages. Is such a strategy feasible in a highly unionised democracy such as SA?

Questioning the feasibility of Boyd's suggestion does not mean the trade union movement has an answer for creating five million new jobs. If the Industrial Strategy Project, with its high skill, high wage, high productivity strategy, in some way reflects union thinking, the lack of an answer is all too apparent. ISP acknowledges its strategy will not create a significant number of jobs. The question remains: what sort of industrial strategy will create jobs?

More research, analysis and debate will be needed to break the deadlock between labour and business in this area. (LAEL BETHLEHEM, KARL von HOLDT).

Focus: Human resource policies



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Lifelong learning and reconstruction *can it deliver?*

The ANC and COSATU have proposed a radical new approach to education and training in SA. These proposals are a central part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme* (the RDP). ANDRE KRAAK** argues there are problems in these proposals which urgently need debate.

The ANC/COSATU proposals seek to establish:

- a unified and integrated education and training system, with a strong commitment to lifelong learning;
- a competency-based modular curriculum framework;
- active labour market policies.

The ANC and COSATU propose an integrated education and training (ET) system to overcome two problems associated with the apartheid era. Firstly, in the past, vocational courses have been too narrowly defined and task-specific. They excluded the broad general knowledge elements such as literacy and numeracy. A second-class vocational track alongside the more prestigious academic track reinforced the race and class inequalities already inherent in apartheid South Africa.

Secondly, academic courses at school in the past were far removed from the conditions under which people worked. For example,

* These proposals are outlined in three key documents: *The Reconstruction and Development Programme, a Policy Framework for Education and Training, and the Industrial Strategy Project*



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school curricula have had little understanding of how changing technologies and employment patterns affect workers' lives.

These obstacles can be overcome by integrating formal schooling with vocational training. The ANC and COSATU have proposed a system of 'lifelong learning' spanning both education and training and school and post-school learning. This system will entail a modular form of progression from one skill level to the next. Certificates for all learning will be issued by a single qualifications authority. This certification structure will have the explicit aim of maximising learners' mobility between and within differing ET institutions. For example, as COSATU has forcefully argued, even a street sweeper should be able to progress through the entire ET system to the level of production engineer. Clearly, such a model has enormous implications for the skilling and empowerment of the working class.

Competency

This system of modular progression through the education system is entirely dependent on a competency-based curriculum.

'Competency' can be defined in the following way:

"Competency-based training is concerned with the attainment and demonstration of specified skills, knowledge and attitudes to minimum industry specified standards rather than with an individual's achievement relative to that of others in a group" (NTB/HSRC, 1985).

The above definition highlights two central features of competency-based systems of learning. Assessment is based on the demonstration of specific skills, for example, the ability to operate a machine. It is different from current school testing which assesses an individual's ability in relation to that of others.

With competency-based models, learners are declared either competent or non-competent. Those declared non-competent are provided with the opportunity of repeating the learning cycle. They may attain competence at a later stage. This model is seen as fairer,

enabling all learners to attain competency and, inevitably, producing a more highly qualified workforce.

Competency models are based in industry 'standards'. They specify the nature of the particular tasks to be performed. Standards, as currently defined, are:

- based on actual job or task performance needs;
- approved by employers;
- known to trainees and their supervisors; and
- attainable by all trainees who meet pre-training selection criteria (NTB/HSRC, 1985).

Competency-based learning methods provide important opportunities for workers to progress on a modular fashion through the ET system. At the same time, they pose serious problems. These will be dealt with later.

Active labour markets

The progression of workers along this modular ET ladder is increased by the implementation of 'active' labour market policies. Active labour markets have four important features:

- continuous skill formation and lifelong learning;
- broad ET to enable maximum mobility across differing employment sectors;
- the reduction of unemployment through retraining and job placement programmes; and
- the reduction of race-, class- and gender-based labour market discrimination.

Active labour markets can only be implemented by an interventionist state and through social contract arrangements between the state, capital and labour. They are therefore different from passive labour market strategies which are reliant on market forces and, to a lesser extent, on the payment of unemployment benefits to workers affected by economic downturns.

Radical reform

Lifelong learning policies have the potential to massively upskill and empower the South African workforce. They can therefore be

considered as radical reform, in the sense outlined by various contributors to the *SA Labour Bulletin* (see endnotes).

These potentially radical gains are, however, not guaranteed. Serious obstacles lie in the path to their success. They will only be overcome through effective political struggle. The discussion below will highlight five serious problems likely to limit the success of the 'lifelong learning' strategies in the RDP.

Problem no 1: The myth of 'lifelong' occupational mobility

Associated with lifelong learning is the myth that all workers at all occupational levels will be able to progress up the occupational ladder if they acquire higher skills. This is simply not true, and rhetoric which argues so has the potential to create false expectations among workers and students. In reality, all economic systems, be they capitalist or socialist, require a hierarchical division of labour. This is

because for every highly skilled specialist, a much larger number of less skilled workers is required.

Despite this limitation, lifelong learning is essential to the task of radically restructuring the organisation of work. It will equip hundreds of thousands of workers with skills which they currently do not have, for example, literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and information technology skills. These workers will become more multi-skilled, although they may not always shift to a higher occupational level. Their training may be important simply in terms of greater productivity at existing occupational levels. Work organisation should be democratically restructured so as to make full use of workers' new capabilities – for example, through teamwork and other participative forms of work organisation. Given higher productivity levels, these workers may accrue substantial rewards through wage increases and other benefits, although their occupational status may not change.

Of course, certain groupings of workers will shift from one occupational level to another as a result of further ET. However, this is likely to occur only in strategically important occupational places. In South Africa, this will entail the upgrading of black operatives to artisanal level and the upgrading of black artisans to technician level. In addition, a certain number of blacks who acquire higher qualifications will move up the job ladder, especially into the professional occupations. Nonetheless, these changes will not apply to the entire workforce.

The impact of lifelong learning will not only be constrained vertically, by the division of labour. It will also be constrained horizontally across the differing economic sectors. Most of the skills upgrading mentioned above is likely to take place in manufacturing, and within urban areas. Different education and training policies will be required to resolve the problems of the informal and rural economies – poverty and high levels



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of unemployment. The priority will be to train people in sustainable self-employment and collective production activities. This will certainly improve their skills, but to a lower level than workers in manufacturing.

A further essential change in the re-organisation of work is a significant reduction in wage differentials between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Pay differences in SA are far greater than those in other countries at an equivalent stage of economic development. However, a levelling of the pay structure will not eliminate the hierarchy of jobs, although it might appear to be flatter. The limitation on the number of employment positions higher up the ladder will remain.

Problem no 2: The dangers of competency models

A further problem facing the ANC/COSATU model of lifelong learning is its support for 'competency-based' methods of curriculum design. Competency models internationally are highly controversial, and in South Africa, such an approach is likely to meet with substantial opposition from both academics and teachers in formal education.

Opposition is likely to be based on fears that narrow competency-driven modular curricula will be imposed on education, thereby inhibiting the creative learning process. Competency models assume that all learning activities can be compartmentalised into separate units, which can then be learnt consecutively, one unit after the other. However, this fragmentation of knowledge has the danger of excluding imagination, creativity and innovation – qualities which cannot easily be measured in quantifiable units, but which are central to a good general education.

Let us use the example of a cyclist. A cyclist never learns separately to incline the body, to turn the wheel, to press the pedals, and to judge how to lean the bike. All this happens in a co-ordinated whole. A complex skill involves elements, none of which can be defined independently of the rest.

Within the industrial sector, competency-based training methods are fairly widespread.

In most cases, such training is very narrow, trapping workers into highly task-specific roles. Competency becomes a very convenient tool for cost-conscious employers, who eagerly apply it to the task of deskilling artisanal labour.

This critique poses a substantial challenge for the ANC and COSATU. Competency models are problematic on two fronts: they are highly resource-intensive and costly (each modular unit requires a curriculum), and their capacity to promote learning is questionable. The drafters of the ANC/COSATU policy are aware of these problems, yet they defend lifelong learning on the grounds that their approach involves a *broad* interpretation of competency – one which provides both a sound general education and vocationally specific skills.

Unfortunately, the real test of the broadness or narrowness of the ANC/COSATU model will only be known once such a system has been implemented – and this may be too late. By this stage, a number of pressures may have been exerted on the system, possibly reshaping its entire character. These pressures could include a cost-conscious state, narrow employer approaches to competency and a legacy of rote-learning in school and industrial training classrooms. Each of these factors may cement future tendencies towards *narrow* competency approaches.

The debate around competency needs to be opened up. A new approach which retains the obvious benefits of modular progression but which puts in place a different form of curriculum design, should be formulated. It would be a tragedy if the current education system, which has failed to develop to the full the intellectual capacities of the majority of people in this country, is replaced by a system destined to do further damage.

Problem no 3: Misreading capital's motives

Much of the enthusiasm for the RDP, and lifelong learning in particular, is based on the assumption that employers will implement the changes agreed to in tripartite forums. In fact,

negotiations around lifelong learning and active labour markets have already reached a surprising degree of consensus (especially in the 1993 Task Team of the National Training Board). However, it would be politically unwise to assume that this consensus at the negotiating table will lead to effective changes on the ground. South African employers will resist many of these measures, particularly the higher costs involved in developing human resources and the linking of continuous skill formation to the upgrading of workers and the payment of higher wages.

South African employers have a long history of neglecting human resources development. Their approach to education and training has been characterised by:

- A poor style of managerial leadership which has failed to understand the rapid pace of socio-economic and technological change.
 - A managerial style informed only by the need for short-term profits, and lacking any long-term perspective. Skills development has suffered as a result of this shortsightedness.
 - Very little internal training, with employers poaching skilled labour from competing companies.
 - No tradition of co-operation between employers and the state (unlike training partnerships in the advanced economies).
 - Authoritarian forms of work organisation.
- Capital's capacity to resist the RDP and lifelong learning reforms will depend on the democratic state's commitment to radical reform, and civil society's strength and ability to reshape the face of industry in a future South Africa. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to educate the mass of workers, teachers and other citizens who still do not understand the complexities of the lifelong learning models. With mass support, it may be possible to ensure a more progressive implementation of these policies. The past tendency to formulate policy models in small forums without the support and informed understanding of key social actors is unlikely to generate the political clout necessary to overcome capital's reluctance for reform.

Problem no 4: The risk of entrenching existing inequalities

Advocates of lifelong learning and a more export-oriented manufacturing sector rely heavily on the assumption that the South African economy has exhausted the economic benefits of fordist methods of production and is now on the verge of a transition to post-fordism. Fordism is an economic system characterised by mass consumer markets, mass production techniques, mechanised assembly lines, authoritarian management and fragmented work.

In contrast, post-fordism is characterised by niche markets (using the car industry, these would be specialised markets in, for example, family cars, the executive car, the sports car and the working woman's car), the new computer-based technologies (computer-integrated manufacturing, CNC machines and robotics) and the more participatory forms of work organisation (multi-skilling, teamwork, quality circles, Just-In-Time). ANC and COSATU policy positions are influenced by the belief that some of South Africa's most critical problems can be addressed by post-fordist forms of industrial organisation.

These assumptions are contentious. Firstly, fordist methods have never constituted the dominant form of production in South African manufacturing. Rather, they co-exist alongside other forms of production, for example 'jobbing'. Here the factory floor is organised around the production of one-off contracts with short-runs, often entailing complex manufacturing and engineering processes. Also, many small manufacturing plants in South Africa are organised around simple technologies, with the family structure providing the labour force.

Secondly, it cannot be said that fordism (assembly line production) in South Africa is on the decline. These mass production methods only emerged in South Africa as late as the 1960s and 1970s. Given such a short lifespan, it is too early to deduce that fordist methods of production have been fully exhausted. With the current political changes, there is likely to be an expansion of markets



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for locally produced goods. This will in turn renew the prospects for mass production. Increased demand for manufactured goods will come from the emergent black middle class and from new markets opening up in Africa.

Thirdly, it cannot be said with any certainty that South Africa has begun the transition to post-fordism. In the international context, a transition to post-fordism in most cases has affected only parts (most often the strategic export manufacturing sectors) of national economies. In South Africa, the evidence suggests that while CAD and CNC technologies have been introduced into the South African manufacturing sector, particularly by 'leading-edge' multi-national corporations, evidence of computer-integrated manufacturing is very remote.

In general, it seems as if the diffusion of the new technologies and new managerial techniques has been gradual and piecemeal, without significant changes to the hierarchical and racist forms of work organisation. Some writers have even suggested that South Africa has entered a transition to neo-fordism —

involving the intensification of the current forms of exploitation with the aid of computerised technology. This has occurred primarily because South African capital is still trapped within a fordist mind-set of seeking to maintain maximum control over labour.

A final problem with the debate about post-fordism is the way in which it has reshaped the meaning of 'growth through redistribution'. Initially, 'growth through redistribution' was conceptualised as a single and unified strategy with two aims: that industry meet basic needs, and that industry adapt to the competitive requirements of the global economy. However, the emphasis on post-fordism has had the effect of giving the restructuring of export industry greater importance at the expense of industry producing for the local market and the rural and informal sectors. As a result, there now exists the possibility that existing economic inequalities — between the developed urban areas and the underdeveloped rural and informal sectors — may be increased by the industrial policies being pursued by the ANC and COSATU.

The Industrial Strategy Project has been most influential in the debates about post-fordism and economic growth. They argue that developing export capacity must be based on the following central pillars:

- the promotion of higher value-added production (adding value to raw materials via new technology and increased skills);
- the introduction of Japanese-inspired forms of participatory work organisation;
- multi-skilling; and
- the development of indigenous technological capacity (Joffe et al, 1993).

These are 'high-skill/high-tech' industrial policy principles associated with post-fordism. However, if we return to the 'redistributive' thrust of 'growth through redistribution' – such as the mass provision of houses, electricity and basic foodstuffs – these all entail fairly labour-intensive production processes reliant on simpler skills and technologies. Again, the threat exists that the inequality between urban and rural areas is amplified and not reduced.

Clearly, what is now urgently required are differentiated economic policies which aim to simultaneously develop the rural economy, provide opportunities for the urban unemployed, and ensure that South Africa is indeed competitive on global markets. While recognising that the new technologies and new forms of work organisation are essential to the success of export-oriented sectors of manufacturing, an over-reliance on post-fordist methods will not assist the process of reducing sectoral inequality in the South African economy.

Problem no 5: Lack of comprehensive planning

An important feature of ANC and COSATU ET policy proposals is an emphasis on *comprehensive planning*, an approach which contrasts sharply with the ad-hoc nature of past policy implementation. This principle has substantial significance for the RDP. Policy planning in one sector should be informed by, and synchronise well with, policy initiatives in other key sectors.

For example, it would be pointless to upgrade the skills of workers via the ET system

if employers did not agree to the re-organisation of work. Current forms of work organisation do not maximise the creative and innovative potential of workers. Rather, they maximise employer control. Similarly, if labour market policies do not change, an increase in skills amongst the disadvantaged will not necessarily result in large-scale occupational mobility. This is because of the gross inequalities which characterise the labour market – along race, class and gender lines.

Also, it would be a futile exercise if economic planning determined the nature of youth training schemes and public works programmes without sufficient regard for the pre-requisites of entry into the ET system. Poor quality training in such schemes will not be recognised by the ET institutions and will not benefit the trainees in the long run.

Finally, training youths in schemes without the security of long-term employment may merely increase their frustrations and anger. Many such schemes have failed dismally in other countries. Success has only been achieved through consensual and highly co-ordinated arrangements between all key social partners – business, labour, the state and the ET institutions.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a trend towards the same ad-hoc policy implementation in the new South Africa as in the old SA. The ANC has launched a massive drive to build a million homes in the next five years. This could provide the foundation for the most impressive upgrading of worker education and training capabilities. However, there seems to be little thought about the training implications. Housing planners are ignoring the importance of linking training into the formal ET system. A similar criticism can be made of the public works programmes emanating from the national Economic Forum and of the Joint Enrichment Project's youth training schemes.

Perhaps the most problematic of all has been the small grouping of ANC and COSATU economic planners, who over the past number of years have developed complex economic policies. These have touched on issues such as value-added exports, new technologies,

enhanced indigenous technological capacity, the development of micro enterprises and co-operative agriculture. However, they have paid scant attention to the human resources required to realise these economic goals.

This tendency is alarming because it has the effect of surrendering the important task of improving skills to the dictates of market forces. Again, it must be stressed that economic growth in the global context of the 1980s and 1990s only materialised in those economies founded on co-ordinated markets and comprehensive planning (for example Germany, Sweden and to a lesser extent, the Pacific rim countries) rather than in those societies based purely on free market principles (England, for example). The central concern here, then, is that we may fall far short of a progressive and successful form of social democracy, which requires co-ordinated and comprehensive planning. Our future may be shaped primarily by market forces.

The way forward

Although the package of lifelong learning policies contained in the RDP represent the most coherent proposals for reconstructing education in South Africa to date, a number of serious problems exist, especially in relation to lifelong learning. The ANC and COSATU will need to undertake further intensive policy work and do extensive lobbying and consulting with their political allies to ensure that lifelong learning attains its full progressive potential. Most important among these tasks is to:

- Develop economic and educational policies which recognise the unevenness between economic sectors and which ensure that social resources are redistributed from advantaged economic sectors to those which face economic impoverishment
- Win support for lifelong learning from key constituencies in education and industry, and engage capital in negotiations about lifelong learning from a position of strength
- Investigate ways in which the obvious mobility benefits of lifelong learning can be retained without the use of narrow competency models.



Lifelong learning: will it give workers new jobs, new hopes ?

- Develop realistic proposals with regard to career progression – proposals which acknowledge the limits on mass upward mobility.
- Plan all social policies *comprehensively* so that, taken together, they ensure increased social equality and economic growth. In isolation of such an approach, individual policies will represent mere ad-hoc tinkering with insignificant levels of social change taking place. *FB*

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Affirmative action *tokenism or transformation?*



Debate around affirmative action has accelerated with recent political changes in South Africa. Unions and employers, and the state itself, are beginning to take affirmative action more seriously.

DEANNE COLLINS discusses the different perspectives.



“We knew if we didn’t start early enough on our own to promote more blacks into skilled and management positions it would be forced on us” – manager

“Affirmative action is not about promotion of a few individuals out of the shop floor, but about workplace democracy involving all of the workers” – trade unionist

Current realities

Affirmative action refers to a set of procedures aimed at proactively addressing the disadvantages experienced by sections of the community in the past. South Africa is a society characterised by complex social stratification. Deep class divisions are compounded by racial and gender distinctions. A mere 2% of private sector assets are owned by black people. It is estimated that, at current rates of accumulation, it will be 100 years before black people own half the shares listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Less than 3% of managers in South Africa are black, with a minuscule proportion of these being women. Even in the informal sector – widely portrayed as the hub of black economic activity – African owners control only 40% of all enterprises.

The public sector is an excellent example of just how effective affirmative action can be. The National Party used the civil service to create jobs for its (largely) white male Afrikaner supporters. Whites occupy 41% of all central government posts and white males hold 99% of all management positions.

Aside from major disparities in economic power and decision-making, this has led to enormous wage disparities between black and white South Africans. In the private sector, (white) managers earn on average 48 times more than workers. Fifteen percent of (black) central government workers receive wages below poverty levels.

The lifting of apartheid laws will not in itself overcome the effects of the economic disempowerment of black people and women. Hence the need for affirmative action programmes.

The business perspective

For business, the greatest fear has been that an ANC-led government will sooner or later introduce legislation which will compel them to address affirmative action. Under these circumstances, many companies have taken pre-emptive action. A recent SEIFSA survey shows, for example, that 38% of engineering companies have affirmative action policies in place, while 61% see the need for such

policies.

For many companies, affirmative action is also a business imperative. One of the ironies of the South African situation is that, while unemployment continues to spiral, the economy is severely constrained by a shortage of technical and managerial skills. These skills shortages cannot be met from the white population alone, nor can skilled foreign labour – which has been used in the past – fill the gap. Many companies also believe that a more representative and integrated workforce will enable them to understand and be more acceptable to their increasingly black consumer market.

Affirmative action in practice

Promotion of black people (and less so women) within companies in South Africa is now fairly common. The focus has, however, been on the advancement and absorption of a few individuals into an existing hierarchy.

Company “black advancement programmes”

identify, recruit and train black people for junior management positions, usually “soft” jobs such as human resources and public relations.

At worst, this amounts to straight tokenism, with ill-qualified black incumbents holding the trappings of

office without any meaningful authority because management does not trust them to do the job anyway. Downgrading occurs, not only at the level of responsibility, but also in terms of benefits and perks (Innes, 1993).

At best, incumbents who may well be qualified to do the job find themselves operating in a hostile work and social environment. They are alienated both from their management “peers” and the majority black workforce, whom they are more often than not employed to “control”.

Management’s failure to give serious

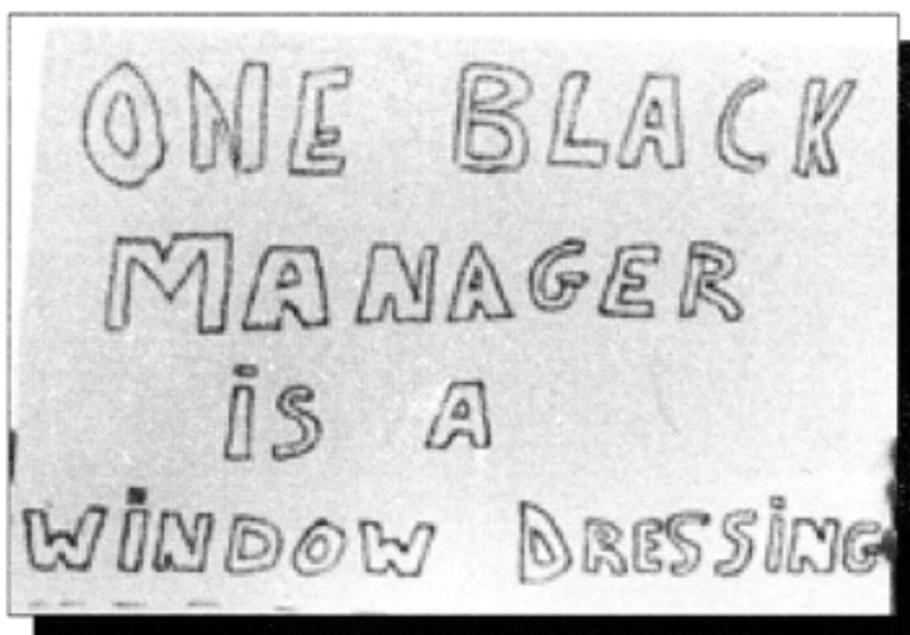
attention to affirmative action is reflected by the fact that responsibility for designing and implementing affirmative action programmes is usually relegated to human resources or personnel departments and not seen as part of a company’s strategic business plan. Even where top management are involved, line and production management, who are often most hostile to such programmes, are not brought on board.

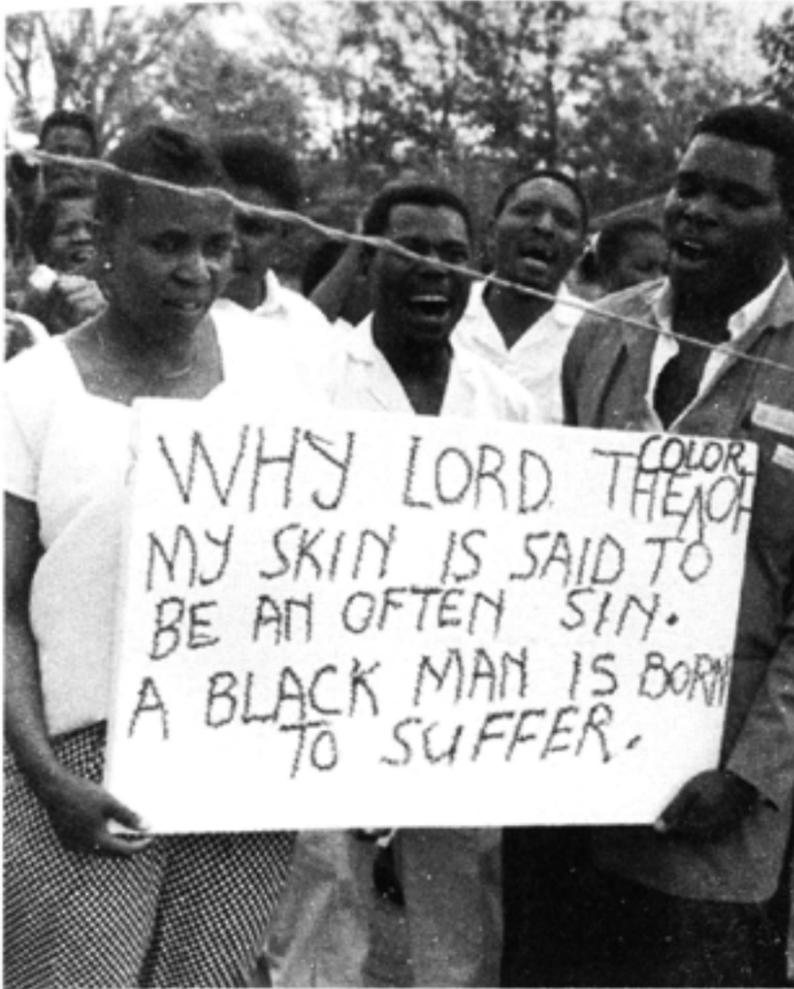
Business’ commitment to improving education and skills – an essential component of any serious affirmative action programme – is largely confined to sponsoring educational institutions through social responsibility programmes. Through these programmes, substantial resources are devoted to the development of black “informal sector” entrepreneurs. The focus on the informal sector has drawn sharp criticism from black business people. As company director Don Mkhwanazi points out, it seems to suggest that blacks should forever confine themselves to being

shopkeepers, taxi and bottle store owners. A number of major public companies have also taken steps to improve their public image through black representation on their boards of directors.

A survey conducted by the

Innes Labour Brief indicates that a number of companies have taken black advancement a few steps further. A major pharmaceutical company, for example, undertook a comprehensive programme of reorganisation to facilitate the creation of 12 new “junior management” posts. Twelve shopfloor workers – one white woman and eleven black men – were taken through an intensive process of both formal and on-the-job training and now occupy positions as supervisors within the company (Yudelowitz, 1993). Programmes to promote black people as supervisors and





foremen are also in place in other companies. While the great majority of artisans are white, there is a slow trickling of Africans into these positions.

The survey also shows that a number of companies have introduced assessment and adult education schemes to enable workers to progress. Grinaker Construction, for example, put 300 workers through such a scheme last year. Most of the companies surveyed also provide bursary schemes to encourage workers and their dependants to gain higher qualifications (Alperson, 1993).

The impact

Even on their own terms, black advancement schemes have had very limited impact. Statistics show that, in the last five years, there has been no overall increase in the number of managerial posts occupied by black people. Where promotions have occurred, men rather than women have been the beneficiaries.

After a programme lasting almost a decade, only four percent of Anglo-Alpha's management is black. Top management at Eskom – which has had an affirmative action policy since 1986 – includes just two black male managers (in marketing and communications) and a black female human

resources manager. Economic recession has also taken its toll on these programmes. Grinaker has retrenched a number of affirmative action employees (Alperson, 1993).

The impact of advancement programmes on the lives of the majority of shopfloor workers has been even more limited. Their position remains structurally the same as under apartheid. Existing power relations remain intact. COSATU general secretary Sam Shilowa puts it succinctly: "The economy continues to be owned and controlled by a small minority, while the majority remain trapped in squalor and poverty. A few blacks and women are co-opted into what was previously a white boys' club. The rules of the game, however, remain fundamentally the same. This is not empowerment, but black economic disempowerment."

The nett effect of these programmes has been to create divisions and conflict on the shopfloor. Unionists and other members of the democratic movement see the advancement schemes as "tokenism" and "window dressing" and view black managers as aspirant capitalists, individualists, "fat cats" and collaborators. This is particularly so when ex-shopstewards or activists are targeted for these promotions. Black supervisors and managers, in turn, are often faced with unenviable choices, especially when industrial action is on the agenda.

A trade union perspective

The starting point for the labour movement is that the economic power structure of South African society requires fundamental changes. Management's fears notwithstanding, social and workplace programmes negotiated directly with workers, rather than legislative measures, are seen as key mechanisms for achieving affirmative action. These would, however, be integrated with national measures, such as reforming the education and training system, as well as with broader economic empowerment.

A human resources policy

For COSATU, affirmative action is part of a wider process involving the provision of basic as well as technical skills to all workers.

COSATU's proposals on affirmative action are integrated into a broader human resources policy. The key elements of this policy are:

- An integrated, certificated education and training system linked to economic planning and restructuring;
- Paid education and training leave;
- Retraining for retrenched or unemployed workers;
- Training linked to grading and pay;
- Career pathing through training;
- Recognition of acquired skills;
- A strong emphasis on adult basic education (ABE);
- Addressing the needs of women workers through training, child-care and other facilities and "equal wages for skills of equal value".

Workplace democratisation

The long-term goal for COSATU is to equip workers with the skills needed to play a significant role in running both the country and the economy. The federation's human resources policy, if implemented, would go a long way in this direction. Workplace democracy is, however, the other side of this equation. Rejecting workers' participation schemes as a "bid to raise levels of productivity and profitability", COSATU general secretary Sam Shilowa calls for a "radical rethink on the process of industrial democratisation, to ensure meaningful economic empowerment of the majority of workers". For him, this involves management surrendering traditional areas of management prerogative such as decisions on investment, technology and distribution of profits.

SACTWU's Ebrahim Patel takes this further. Real affirmative action will involve collective bargaining being extended beyond wage rates and conditions of service to include such issues. While the strengthening of tripartite institutions such as the National Economic Forum (NEF) and the establishment of centralised bargaining structures are key to such a process, he also notes that "at plant level, trade unions need to have access to real power in shaping production and participating in decision-making". Meaningful worker

involvement in decision-making will also require transparency of action and disclosure of information by management.

The role of the state

COSATU feels the state should play an important role in implementing affirmative action. The state should:

- Set an example for the private sector through public sector employment practices;
- Make commissioning of goods and services by the state from private sector companies, as well as state funding or subsidies, conditional on the supplier showing satisfactory progress in implementing affirmative action;
- Ensure that the country's labour market statistical base is expanded in order to be able to monitor progress nationally; and
- Set in place an efficient monitoring body.

A vision without a programme?

In a recent presentation to COSATU, NUMSA's Adrienne Bird noted that "the central problem with the present (affirmative action) policy is that (it) does not give clear guidelines within which the goal can be achieved".

Chris Bonner and Jan Mahlangu of CWIU agree. Writing in *The Shopsteward*, they note that "we... believe that all our demands and struggles... are by their very nature, designed to bring about affirmative action. However, this argument is no longer good enough in the present context. We need to put forward specific, concrete proposals on affirmative action that we can sit down and negotiate with management".

The COSATU human resources policy is comprehensive and far-reaching. However, it has not yet been implemented in any systematic way. Only a few affiliates have taken it up in their sectors.

One of the policy's strong points is that it has the potential for far-reaching restructuring of whole sectors of the economy. Implementation will, in the first instance, require strong centralised bargaining structures. This is still an elusive goal in many sectors



Waiting for change: will affirmative action reach the floor?

where COSATU affiliates organise.

Even where centralised bargaining exists, problems arise. NUMSA led the way in formulating and implementing human resources policies. Centralised bargaining exists in the three major sectors where the union organises.

Last year "state of the art" agreements were entered into in the engineering, auto and tyre industries. "In-principle" agreement was achieved on the union's proposals for a completely restructured approach to grading, training and wages.

However, the practicalities of implementation have proved to be another story. The union is currently in dispute with auto employers around training modules, payment for education and wage differentials.

NUMSA has also found that principles adopted at national level are often not implemented at plant level. Organisational weaknesses compound this problem. Organisers and shopstewards do not always have the information and skills to take on management at plant level and find themselves overcome by detailed company proposals to which they cannot respond.

In an attempt to address these problems, the CWIU has drawn up a step-by-step action plan for negotiating affirmative action at the workplace. This includes guidelines on policy negotiations, research, formulating and negotiating demands and monitoring mechanisms. It is still too early to assess whether this has had any impact.

Workplace democracy

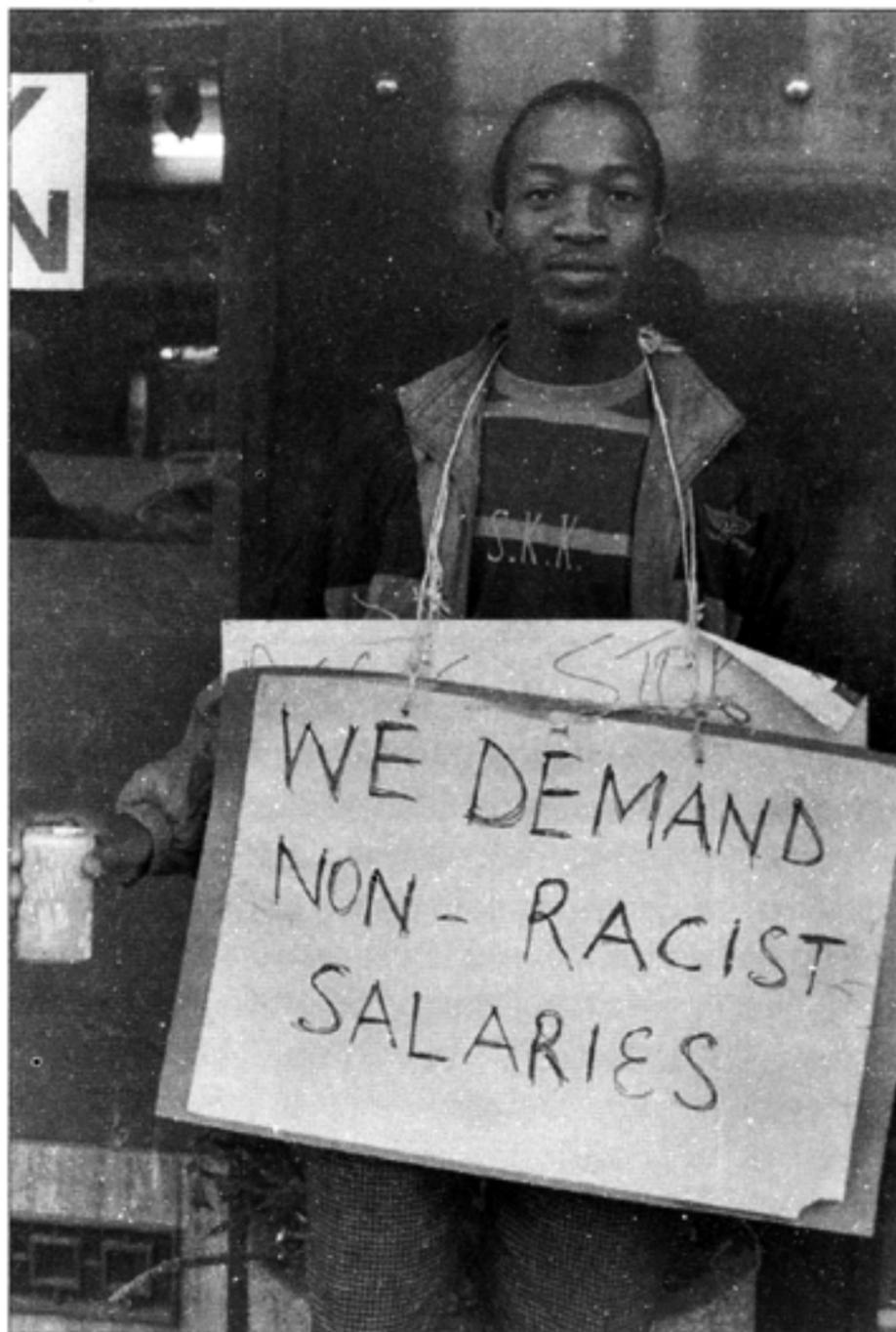
In recent years, management has introduced a wide range of "participation" schemes at workplace level. Unions' response to these initiatives has been extremely ambiguous and characterised either by an "ignore it and it will go away" attitude or outright rejection without posing concrete alternatives.

COSATU's proposals on workplace democratisation would, if implemented, have a major impact on power relations at the workplace. However, they need to be translated into practice.

A major question which needs to be answered is precisely how workplaces and institutions should be managed. Through

Continued on page 48

CWIU strategy for affirmative action



PROCESS

Step One: Negotiate the policy

Negotiate a statement of principle on non-discrimination and affirmative action with management.

This must have the status to bind the company, management, white workers and anyone else who might be resistant to affirmative action. It may be necessary to hold workshops with various groupings in the company to bring them on board.

Demands:

- Policy statement
- Commitment by the highest level of company to the statement and to implementation of a programme
- Time off for discussion with workers
- Management to commit itself to bringing all management on board.

Step Two: Research on the workers

Do a detailed study of the status of women and blacks in the company. This would include looking at what jobs they do and what grades they are in, as well as what wages they earn.

This could be done by a contracted researcher, together with a joint committee set up for this purpose.

Demands:

- Full disclosure of information
- A Joint Affirmative Action Committee, comprised of equal representatives from the union and from management
- Union training for shopsteward representatives on the committee
- Time off to do research
- Employment of a researcher, paid for by management.

Step Three: Research on policies and practices

Do further research which scrutinises all policies and practices in the company for

discrimination and barriers to equality. Such research would look for hidden, as well as obvious, barriers.

It will be very important to identify those policies and practices which discriminate against blacks and women, and deny them equality of opportunity. An example would be unnecessary educational requirements for a job or lack of paid maternity leave. Some of the areas to be looked into could include:

- recruitment procedures
- selection standards and procedures for promotion, training and employment
- working conditions eg. health, safety, hours
- training and education
- career paths
- discipline procedures and practices
- retrenchment
- retirement
- wages
- benefits
- facilities
- special protections/code of conduct eg. sexual harassment.

Demands:

as at Step Two.

Step Four: Plan

Publish the findings of your research in the company and amongst union membership. Then develop your strategic plan. It should include the following elements:

- removing all barriers to equality – all discriminatory practices, policies or procedures uncovered in the research
- formulating positive measures
- setting time frames and targets
- monitoring and evaluation.

Step Five: Negotiate the plan

Negotiate the overall plan with management.

Demands:

- Management to agree to the overall plan
- Management to agree to provide all facilities, finances, training necessary to implement the plan.

Step Six: Negotiate details of the plan

Start to negotiate details of the plan.

How this is done will depend on circumstances. If there are many issues that need to be negotiated, then you will need to set priorities, timing and so on. This will obviously be an ongoing process.

Priority One: negotiate the removal of barriers. You might decide to start for example, with removing barriers to employment and promotion. This will involve such things as advertising of posts, selection criteria (like educational qualifications), and tests used for placing workers in training programmes.

Priority Two: negotiate on positive measures to be implemented. These could include Adult Basic Education programmes, bridging courses, counselling about careers, and encouraging or building confidence in people to do other work. For genuine affirmative action, positive measures will also have to include community and wider social upliftment.

Step Seven: Implement

- Work out your goals, time frames and targets. You will need short, medium and long-term goals. Just for example, say our goal is to have artisans reflect the population of the community by 1998. We'd say the intake of apprentices over the next 5 years must be 100 percent black and 50 percent women. In the short term, the company must advertise this widely in the community.
- Negotiate and agree on these with management.
- Remember that each part of the programme will require time frames and targets.

Step Eight: Monitor

Monitor progress systematically and keep a proper record. This could be the job of a joint monitoring committee. 

Continued from page 45

flattening of the hierarchies traditionally found in all sectors of the economy. Does this mean that workers will be in a position to manage themselves? Will we see a situation where fewer and fewer supervisors are necessary?

The demand is also for effective participation at the highest levels of decision-making. If this is to be more than a token presence, workers will need extensive skilling of a kind that will not be achieved overnight.

Aspirations and expectations

Denied the opportunity to play any meaningful role in the political and economic life of this country, the majority of workers expect real (and rapid) changes in the "new" South Africa. It should not be assumed that the spirit of "egalitarianism" in the COSATU proposals will necessarily find favour with all workers.

NUMSA has discovered that black artisans are ambiguous about the union's proposed career path structure. It will mean that artisan-level workers will not enjoy the same privileges relative to lower categories of workers as were enjoyed by white artisans in the past. NUM has confidently stated that black mine supervisors will reject the privileges accorded to their white counterparts in the past. It remains to be seen whether this will indeed be the case.

If the restructuring proposed by the unions succeeds, and results in fewer supervisors, how will this answer the aspirations of black workers who have the skills and capacity to perform supervision work, but have been denied the opportunity to do so?

There is a real danger that the training/grading/wages package proposed by the unions could result in immense frustration among workers if unaccompanied by major reorganisation of production. Management is unlikely to accede to demands to pay workers higher wages for newly acquired or recognised skills unless they are actually performing higher-valued jobs. Unless labour devotes substantial attention to restructuring and succeeds in achieving its goals, most workers

will remain in much the same position they are in at present.

Redefining the bargaining unit

Flawed though they might be, initiatives already taken by management have resulted in a layer of black supervisory and management staff. Their numbers will increase as time goes on. Unions need to think carefully about how they will relate to this layer, as well as to the increasing numbers of black artisans.

Traditionally, COSATU unions have been based on blue-collar, semi- and unskilled membership. The unions have secured the right to bargain on behalf of this membership, but the bargaining unit normally excludes skilled and white-collar workers. Unless these workers are drawn in, they could sabotage the unions' restructuring initiatives particularly if, as has been the trend, they join hands with conservative, previously white staff associations and unions.

One option is to actively recruit these workers and redefine the bargaining unit to include them. This poses its own dangers. Like overseas, particularly in the United Kingdom, unions could become dominated by the interests of professional and skilled workers.

Women lose out

While comprehensive guidelines exist for improving the position of women workers, very little progress has been made in this regard. There is a danger that the proposals themselves could marginalise women workers even further. Bird says that the typical management response to the demands is to ensure that they employ as few women as possible. Concerted campaigning will be necessary to ensure that this trend is reversed.

A confused state

COSATU wants the state to set an example for the private sector through public sector employment practices. Although it is early days, indications are that the federation may well be disappointed.

The ANC-led government is not only hamstrung by constitutional guarantees to current civil service incumbents; in the past



White face of management: will affirmative action change the colour?

few months it has shown an inability to come to grips with the issue of affirmative action in the public sector. The recent debacle around the appointment of "special" ministerial staff, which ANC secretary general Cyril Ramaphosa defended in the name of affirmative action, is a case in point.

A significant number of the recently announced 11 000 civil service posts have been designated "role-playing" positions. No one is sure what this means, but the intention seems to be to prepare black incumbents for eventual high office in the public service. Experience in other African countries, Zimbabwe in particular, has shown that unless careful training and mentoring schemes accompany such a process, it is doomed to failure. Another problem is that no clear guidelines exist for recruiting and selecting civil servants to ensure that affirmative action is achieved. Two million people have applied for the 11 000 jobs and no system is in place to process these applications with affirmative action in mind.

The public sector unions have not developed comprehensive strategies on these issues and will need to make major interventions to take charge of the process.

Moving forward

Labour has tended to dismiss management initiatives on affirmative action as tokenism

and window dressing.

A number of company schemes certainly fit this description, but there have been some serious attempts to address the issue. Where there is the will, the way has often been hampered by the scarcity of skilled candidates to take up positions.

The unions' have drawn up far-reaching policy proposals, which have not been seriously addressed by management. What has been missing is a strategy for engaging management

on affirmative action.

The CWIU model goes a long way towards providing this strategy (see page 66 & 67). Through engagement at the workplace, unions could move towards joint control of the affirmative action process and ensure that their members' interests are advanced.

For management, this could provide a way of taking the conflict out of affirmative action. For both parties it would open up opportunities to take the heat out of racial relations at the workplace and to explore different ways of resolving a broad range of issues. ☆

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Job evaluation: *progress and questions*



In SA the first stepstowards broad-banding job grades are being taken. FAITH MACDONALD* raises some dilemmas.

Over the past few years, the union movement has placed considerable emphasis on tackling the question of grading jobs in a more equitable fashion. Three years ago, NUMSA initiated the move towards "broad-banding", first in the auto assembly and then in the metal industry. It proposed that the number of scheduled jobs below artisan level be reduced to a maximum of five, as opposed to 13, for example, in the metal industry. These grades were to be determined by skill and competency. This provided for not only career paths, but the portability of skills between

industries.

The five-grade system has already been implemented in the auto industry, but, this year, demands have surfaced to review and redefine certain occupations. There is now a need "to agree on an acceptable mechanism to resolve disputes during the transition to a skill- and competency-based system of evaluation."

In the metal industry, there is an in-principle agreement to reach this goal by 1 July 1996. A technical working committee of employer and trade union representatives has outlined a proposal for basic skill definitions for the five industry grades from general labourer to artisan. Behind these moves lies a shift from the traditional premise of grading based on tasks performed, to the skills and competencies required to perform the job in question.

Extensive research, locally and internationally, has led to considerable progress by the various working groups party to the National Training Board. This is looking into a policy based on ten years formal schooling, progressing to various forms of vocational and tertiary education and training. This would provide for modular credits which would lead to formal qualifications at a number of levels. Combined with an intensive approach to adult basic education, this policy will, in theory, provide the skills required for industry and career progression. In addition, Sectoral Education and Training Organisations (SETOs) will provide for specific industry requirements.

Before examining the implications of these changes, it is pertinent to note that the original schedules in the metal industry date back to the 1940s, when many scheduled jobs were defined arbitrarily. This acted as a form of job reservation for white workers. Many grades

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relied on a single-sentence description which bore little, if any, relation to the skills involved in performing the function.

Despite industrywide agreements, many companies which are party to centralised bargaining introduce "secondary" systems geared to perceived individual needs. Historically, two of the most popular systems used have been the Paterson and Peromnes methods. These use decision-making and a numerical calculation based on eight job-related factors. However, these were both devised decades ago for the Fordist/Taylorist production methods. In modern society, it is unrealistic to have eight – and up to 11 in the mining industry – levels of low and semi-skilled work.

Grading and workplace reorganisation

Given increasing emphasis on teamwork and multi-skilling, the establishment of more equitable systems is a top priority. What is needed is a method which takes into account skills and competence and at the same time provides for monetary compensation which eliminates glaring historical discrepancies.

There can be no doubt that grading is critical to workplace re-organisation and participation. South African business organisations have been characterised by a military-style hierarchical structure. If a 'meaner, leaner and flatter' – and fairer – structure is to be achieved, then the methods for evaluating the skills and worth of the workforce must be restructured. Take an example where all members of a work team have similar skills, are capable of rotation and are responsible for production targets and quality control. In such a case, there is no justifiable reason to grade them at different levels.

Broad-banding is a far more acceptable option, but its introduction in the South African context will give rise to many challenges and obstacles. Many questions arise.

Skills and value

Is it realistic to grade jobs simply on a skill or competency basis which does not take

sufficient cognisance of other worth factors? While the NUMSA slogan, "Sweeper to Engineer", is laudable, the plain facts are that not all sweepers want to or have the ability to become engineers. Furthermore, many jobs which require little skill are crucial to any organisation, and indeed society. Without the contribution of these lower-skilled functions, other more highly skilled occupations cannot be performed satisfactorily. Examples which immediately spring to mind are the well-worn ones of garbage collectors and cleaners.

Is it equitable to penalise such workers in terms of status or monetary compensation when they are performing valuable contributions? The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has demanded that grades be reduced from eight to four. In motivating this, the union said, "jobs should be distributed between the grades in a 'fair manner' which recognises the real contribution that workers make as well as the environment (surface/underground) in which jobs are carried out".

However, it is doubtful that employers and unions perceive 'real contribution', 'value', 'worth', 'stress' and 'danger' in the same light. Consensus will need meaningful negotiation with unions, as well as direct worker participation in decision-making on this. In Western society, there is a dubious general perception that managerial and white collar work carries more worth and monetary value than shopfloor work. In Japan and Germany, the philosophy is that, without the product, there is no company. Considerably more prestige and worth is given to the production environment. This is a lesson from major economies.

It could be postulated that not only worth, but 'skills' and 'competency' can be viewed as 'value-laden' (to say nothing of talent). There is therefore a risk that determining such variables at plant level will be highly subjective. This is more so if the union in the workplace is weak and not part of determining the distribution of skills in actual job content.

The recently published discussion document on a National Training Strategy which outlines proposals for a National

Qualification Framework acknowledges that competencies, are more or less impossible to measure or define. The document substitutes this term with the more appropriate word, 'outcome'. Thus, as noted previously, negotiation and worker participation is crucial in order to ensure fairness in respect of differing 'outcome' needs and levels within specific workplace situations.

Further dilemmas

An additional dilemma is that any qualification is only as good as the opportunities it provides. It could be argued that – at least in the short and medium term – a danger exists in training people for ultimately non-existent job openings in the formal or informal sector. This could be particularly pertinent to those employed and trained on a short-term basis through Public Works Programmes.

There is a need to identify not just current but future skill requirements. These skills will be needed for South Africa's industrial and service base to become adequately competitive



Will broadbanding grades fill the pay packet?

in a rapidly changing global economy. Computerised technology and data are becoming increasingly sophisticated and place very different demands on person-power and adaptability – at all levels of an enterprise or corporation.

SETOs will have to assess longer-term skill requirements necessitated by new technology options in their own sectors. There is no value in devising training programmes to equip workers, especially the unemployed, with skills which could be obsolete in five years time.

Each job or function within a specified industry or organisation has to be carefully analysed to ascertain the precise nature and worth of the work performed and range of ability required. In addition, the degree of skill within each band must be determined in order to eliminate overlap. This is a very tricky area. Skill bands will vary between organisations within the same industry, and even more so between differing industries. Indeed, NUMSA demands in the auto industry illustrate this.

The portability of skills is also limited. For example, there are 15 categories of mechanics. An auto mechanic familiar with the assembly and production of one manufacturer cannot simply transfer those skills to a plant producing a totally different model. This has distinct implications for the feasibility of 'portable' and transferable skills. Hopefully, the SETO's will help overcome this problem, but this cannot be done overnight.

Another major hurdle is "the recognition of prior learning". This relates to the knowledge and skills acquired on-the-job and through work experience as opposed to any formal training or qualification. Numerous skills on the shopfloor have not been recognised or utilised due to apartheid. Over the past few years, this has been of mounting concern to the unions. Many workers perform the work of qualified artisans but, for reasons beyond their control, have been unable to obtain the necessary qualification. They have therefore not received the appropriate status or monetary reward from the employer. Given that many such people are at best semi-literate, the criteria on which they are tested for competence will require innovation.



Move to teamwork requires new approach to grading

Grading professional and managerial jobs

If the skills and knowledge needed for any job are measured through, for example, an adequately devised scale ranging from simple to very complex (ie simple, medium, complex, very complex), this principle can be applied to all components of any job, be it manual, technical, cognitive or managerial. This mechanism can be used to define the number of bands applicable to an entire organisation.

Most of the debate on job evaluation and training is geared towards the vocational and technical aspects of work, with the intention of upgrading the skill of the production workforce. However, the broad-banding method could apply equally to managerial and professional personnel, as in Japan.

Given that any form of evaluation is linked to pay, a reward structure based on broad-banding principles could include provision for the negotiation of not only minima and maxima wages, but also the acquisition of skills, long service, productivity, value, merit and any other criteria the parties to any agreement might deem feasible. Because the differential between the minima and maxima per band is considerably greater than that of current grading systems, there is greater scope for negotiating the amount paid to employees in respect of these factors.

Notwithstanding the above questions, NUMSA's proposals for in-depth audits of all jobs undertaken within strict parameters based on actual job content and the degree and variety of skill and value involved, together with adequate opportunities for workers to acquire additional skills (both through external and internal training) and/or responsibility to move to a higher level are a

radical improvement on the past.

Conclusion

The upgrading of the current workforce to meet immediate needs and the longer-term measures to produce a generation geared towards the development of a more highly skilled and adaptable workforce are of crucial economic importance.

However, in attempting to achieve this, care must be taken not to "lose the forest for the trees". A productive workplace is crucial to economic recovery, a meaningful reduction in unemployment and a competitive edge in world markets. Union involvement and worker empowerment and participation is of the utmost importance in achieving such a recovery.

However, most of our trading partners have long since recognised that full employment belongs in the past and that large numbers of the economically active population will be unable to find formal employment in their lifetimes. This being the case, care should be taken not to introduce over-zealous but potentially restrictive education and vocational training (as well as grading) systems which do not permit sufficient flexibility for the needs of human beings and their potential contribution to alternative aspects of society. Not everyone has aspirations to be president, be it of a corporation or a country. *Fe*

New relations on the shopfloor?

by *KARL VON HOLDT*

Should shopstewards become involved in disciplining workers? Does working in teams provide new opportunities, or does it divide workers? Can shopstewards engage with management's 'worker participation' projects, or will they be accused by their members of selling out? These were some of the key questions debated at a week-long training course held in the NUMSA Wits-West region in June.

The workshop, led by NUMSA education officer Roger Etkind, aimed to equip shopstewards to respond to management initiatives in 'worker participation' and 'lean production', such as green areas, TQM, JIT, multi-tasking and team-work. The workshops also aimed to deepen shopstewards' understanding of NUMSA's training and grading strategy. Similar workshops are to be held in all NUMSA regions.

"Management proposes, we reject"

At the heart of the workshop was the question whether – and how – shopstewards can move from a strategy of simply resisting management proposals to proactive unionism. A number of shopstewards reported how they had prevented the implementation of green areas, or avoided productivity deals. In mock negotiations, shopstewards demonstrated a sharp ability to resist management initiatives with delaying tactics, or by simply denying the existence of a problem outlined by management (for example, low productivity, poor quality, high absenteeism).

The problem is how to go beyond the tactics of resistance. Shopstewards from Envirotech, for example, explained that they had rejected managements' proposals for

teamwork, because it was based on multi-tasking, ie it loaded workers with extra tasks without upgrading their skills or wages. "But", they said, "we are unable to make proposals of our own. Management proposes, we reject. They propose, we reject. We need help from our local office."

Etkind comments that local organisers often avoid dealing with these problems, because they are complex and time-consuming.

Discipline

The workshop began to address the problem by providing a forum for shopstewards to discuss and compare different responses. Shopstewards from Toyota Marketing, for example, explained that they have a role in guiding or reprimanding workers if they break company regulations. Management accepts this role. A disciplinary hearing is only called if workers are unable to solve the problem.

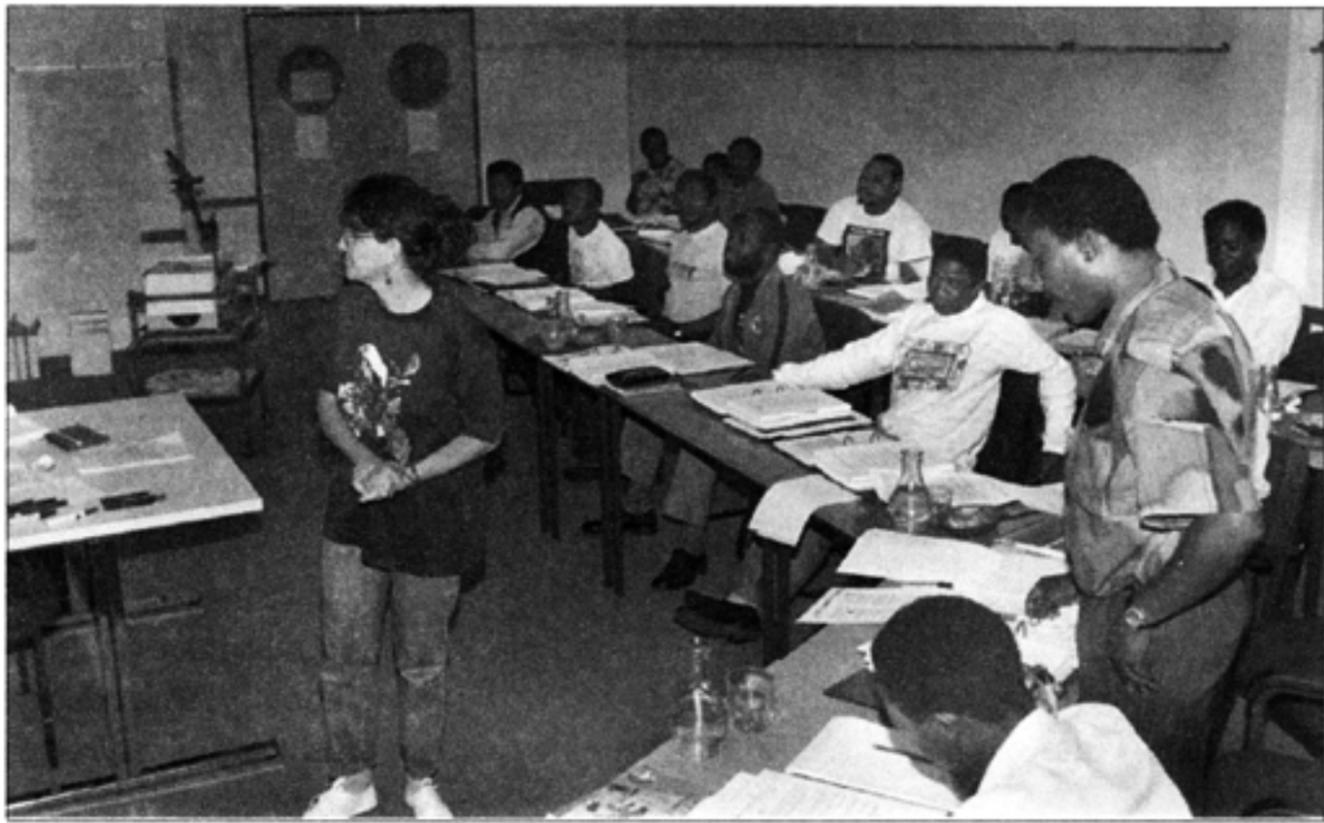
Other shopstewards attacked this, arguing that the Toyota shopstewards were taking on management's responsibilities, and would forget their responsibility to their members. Toyota shopstewards rejected this: "We are saving workers from management discipline – you know discipline means dismissal." Other workers supported them, commenting that shopstewards often lose disciplinary cases, and that in the end even local organisers would say the worker was wrong and could not be defended.

Teamwork

There was also extensive discussion about teamwork. Many expressed the concern that teamwork could promote competition between groups of workers. One team might make proposals that could adversely affect

workers outside the team.

Organisers suggested this problem could be overcome by insisting that bonuses for improved productivity be paid out to the entire workforce instead of one team only. Suggestions for improving production should be co-



Training of shopstewards and organisers is crucial – not only for unions, but for industrial renewal

ordinated through the shopsteward committee, to avoid competition and division. One worker objected: "But if one department makes good suggestions, why should others share the money?"

Shopstewards also debated whether teamwork meant removing the supervisor; whether the team leader should do the work of the supervisor; and whether the team leader should be paid extra. Etkind presented the union model of a "multi-skilled" team working, for example, on an assembly-line. Each member would have the general skills necessary for assembly work, and each worker would also have specialist skills in specific areas, such as quality control, tool setting or maintenance. This would provide opportunity for further training and a career-path.

Worker participation – does it have a future?

'Worker participation' holds many dangers for workers – it may lead to division, job loss and increased work pressure. Shopstewards are sharply aware of this, and of the dangers of losing the confidence of members if they associate too much with management.

But if shopstewards rely only on the old tactics of resistance they may lose the

opportunity to influence change on the shopfloor. They may also find that their employer becomes less and less competitive, and members' jobs are threatened.

A different way of responding to this is proactive unionism, or strategic unionism, where the union makes proposals which may address some of managements' concerns, while also advancing members' interests. But shopstewards and organisers cannot make proposals if they are not equipped with the necessary information and confidence. The NUMSA workshops are a crucial part of doing this.

There is an enormous amount of distrust on the shopfloor. Shopstewards will not take management's concerns seriously unless they are confident they are equipped to independently assess production problems, as well as management proposals, and to defend their members' interests while engaging with such issues.

This is what makes the demands for paid time-off for shopsteward training, for full-time or part-time shopstewards, and for general meetings in working time (so shopstewards can keep close contact with members) so crucial to the future of industry. Employers and government would do well to heed union demands for these rights. *R*

Construction workers bypass union

By DEANNE COLLINS

“A living wage and democratisation of the Industrial Council.” These are the demands of the 7 to 10 000 construction workers who went on strike for three weeks in Cape Town.

According to CAWU members of a number of different unions joined hands in spontaneous strike action. The unions involved are CAWU (COSATU), BCAWU (NACTU), and the more conservative Building Workers Union, SA Masons Society and the SA Woodworkers Union.

Workers are insisting that their unions come together to resolve the issues. They have set up the Building Workers' Council, a joint structure which is supervising and co-ordinating negotiations with the Industrial Council for the Building Industry (Western Province). One artisan and one general worker from each major construction company sit on this council. The council insists that it, rather than the various unions, conduct negotiations with employers.

Workers say the industrial council (IC) is too bureaucratic. They also claim that employers dominate all the structures of the council. They are against union officials

representing workers in the council and want elected worker representatives to be able to participate fully in the workings of the council.

The secretary of the IC, Koos Kitshoff, responds that “the council is already a democratically elected body”. The council is made up of equal numbers of employer and worker representatives. Kitshoff points out that unions elect their own representatives and there is nothing in the constitution of the council to prevent workers from being elected. All structures of the council comprise half employer and half union delegates.

Kitshoff feels that workers need to be taught about how councils work. Rodney Damon of the Building Workers Union agrees. He maintains that “most of the workers have no inkling of how the council works”.

Is the IC democratic?

Trade union seats on the IC are disproportionate to membership. The older craft unions dominate the council. A source in the industrial council says that the racial

composition of the council is highly skewed. Most union representatives are not African. Even if the council operated on strictly democratic lines, CAWU and BCAWU would still be in the minority, because they represent a minority of workers in the sector. CAWU has around 3 000 and BCAWU 2 000 members. The biggest union in the



sector, the Building Workers' Union, has 30 000 members.

As an interim measure, the council has agreed to allow eight additional worker representatives, nominated by the Building Workers' Council, to sit in on negotiations. They do not, however, have speaking rights.

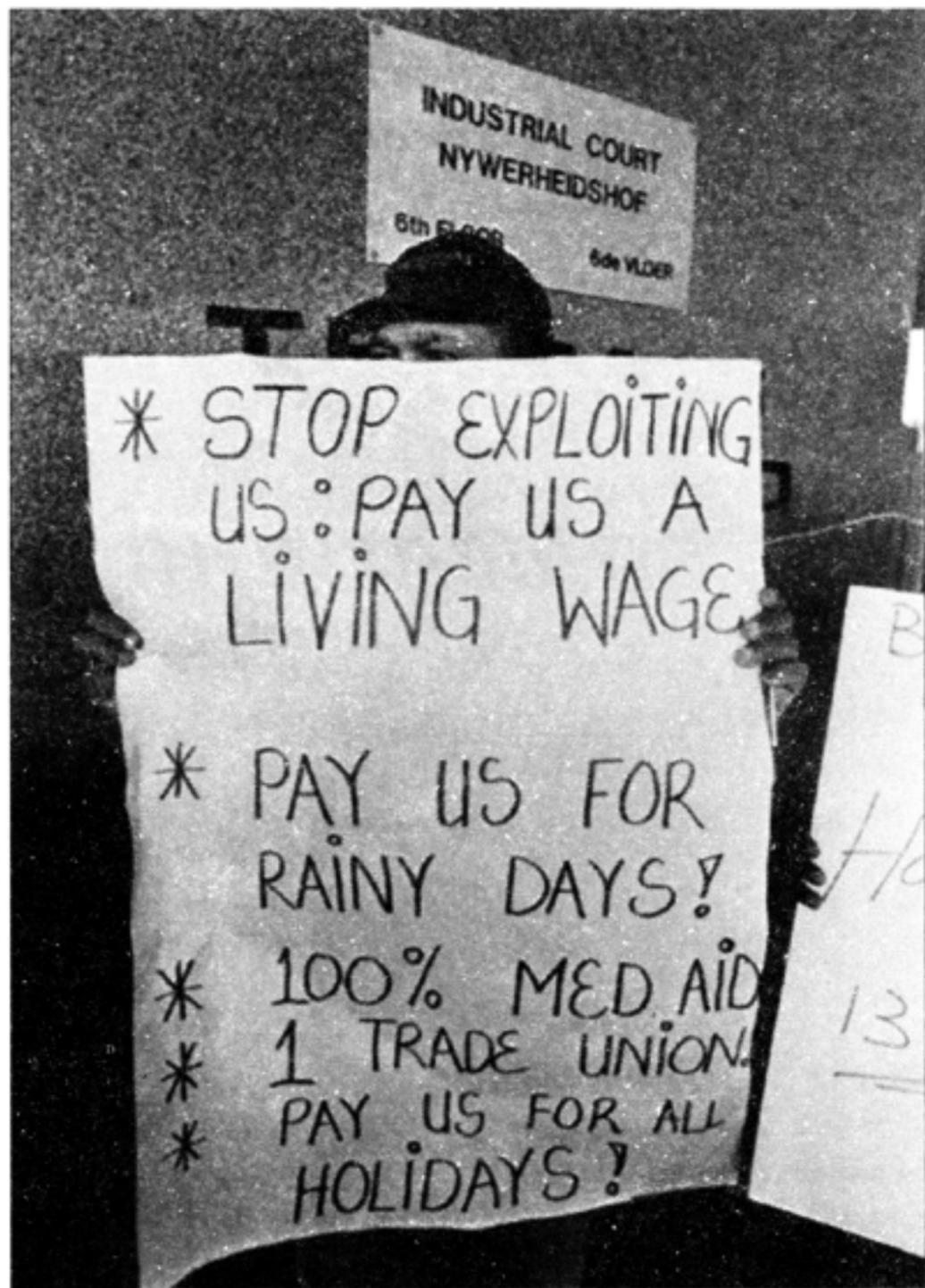
The workers' council has set up its own sub-committees to investigate and make recommendations on a number of issues. One committee is dealing with changes to the industrial council constitution, while others will make recommendations around the pension and sick funds, disciplinary procedures and the stamp system.

Another committee is dealing with wage demands. Workers are demanding that their wages be brought into line with wages in other parts of the country. Currently, artisans in Cape Town earn R11,23 an hour, while general workers get R5,08. Workers are demanding R30 and R22,50 respectively. This represents an increase of over 167% for artisans and 343% for general workers.

The employers' body, the Master Builders Association, is offering 7,5%, which for general workers translates into only 34 cents an hour.

Strike action, which started in mid-July, was suspended on 2 August and negotiations are continuing. Workers have given the council until 10 September to reach a settlement.

CAWU regional secretary Lulamile Mqikela says that the events of the past few weeks have shown that "workers don't want apartheid unions anymore". He is optimistic that a single union for construction workers can be established.



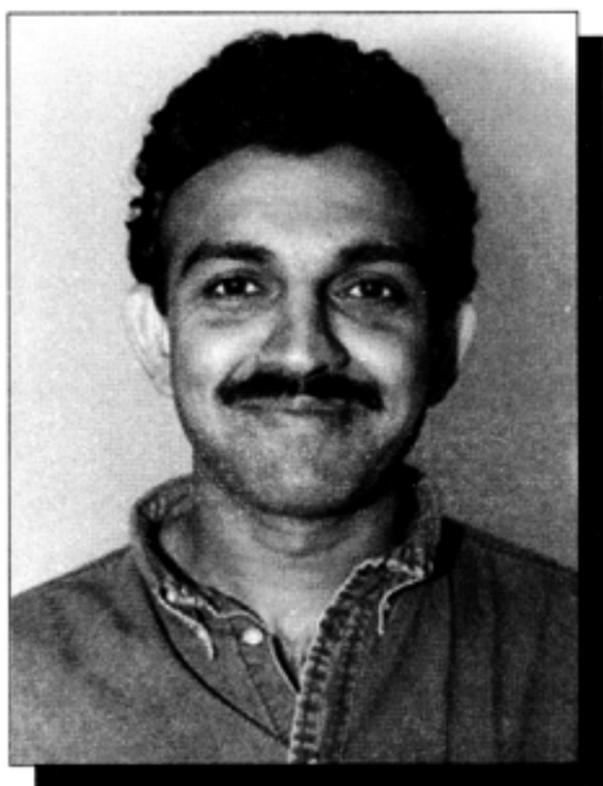
Relations between the different unions have not been that easy, however. Damon of the Building Workers Union claims the majority of its members were "intimidated" into joining the strike. Its artisan members were forced to stop work because they had no labour to work with. He claims artisans do not support the wage demands because "they know these demands will just cause unemployment".

Countering these claims, BCAWU regional organiser, Theo Ntsomi says that some of the unions come to negotiations without a mandate from their members and that they are undermining the authority of the workers' council. The unions are divided and are not presenting a united front in negotiations. He feels that co-operation between the unions still has a long way to go. R

With 25 000 workers on strike employers and unions reach a new deadlock of 0,5%. ASHWIN DESAI gives a blow-by-blow account of how deadlock was reached.

Auto strike

so near and yet so far ...



At lunch time on Monday 1 August, some 25 000 workers in the automobile industry downed tools. This action came after three days of balloting in which 76% of NUMSA members mandated an industry-wide strike.

Central to the issues of contention were the overcoming of wage anomalies that are the direct outcome of our apartheid past, and the wage offer itself.

Apartheid wage gap

In the 1960s the prevailing racial hierarchy on the shopfloor was reinforced by Job Reservation Determination No 16 of 1964. The Determination gave legal support to racial advantage by preserving all jobs then

occupied by whites for whites and by placing barriers to the kind of jobs blacks could undertake. While exemptions from the Determination were catered for, Adler's research on Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) reveals that white workers were assured higher skill grades and supervisory positions without reference to their skills or education levels. For example, while black workers needed a Standard 8 certificate to move to a higher grade, no such proviso existed for white workers. By the late 1970s, 45% of white workers interviewed at Ford did not have a Standard 8 qualification, yet were located at the highest wage grade (Adler 1993, p51).

The 'job reservation' in the industry was complemented by a pay structure highly favourable to white workers and far removed from international standards. Production workers earned approximately 60% of the salary of skilled workers compared to a normal international standard of 85%. NUMSA also claims that salaried workers, who constitute less than one third of the total staff, consume over 45% of the wage bill.

While both the Automobile Manufacturers Employers Organisation (AMEO) and NUMSA agreed that such wage anomalies need to be addressed, there was a dispute about time-frames. NUMSA wanted a two-year time-frame, and subsequently changed this to a three-year time-frame, while the employers favoured a four-year period.

Wage offer

At the onset of negotiations, NUMSA proposed a 23% wage increase. This was dropped to 15% and finally to 12% of actual earnings immediately before the strike. NUMSA based its demand partly on the argument that the consumer price index (CPI) on basic foods was 11,5% and that members had accepted increases of less than the CPI during the last two years of the recession. The employers' offer just before a dispute was declared was 9% on the industry average per grade.

Negotiations continue

Talks between NUMSA and AMEO continued in Port Elizabeth after the start of the strike. On the first day, 3 August, the talks centred around education and training, job security and the extension of the bargaining unit. Although described as 'tense', both sides remained optimistic. However, on Thursday, once the wage offer and wage policy was discussed, negotiations became heated. The day culminated in union officials toyi-toying out of the negotiations venue. There was uncertainty about what would happen on Tuesday the 9th, the next scheduled meeting date.

By the weekend of 6/7th August, both parties signalled their intention to return to the negotiating table at the Midland Chamber of Industries.

Tuesday 9 August was to see dramatic shifts as both sides made concerned efforts to reach consensus on the wage offer and wage policy. Tuesday marked the first appearance of Mercedes-Benz' Ian Russel, highly regarded in union circles as a shrewd negotiator. Interestingly, he was flanked by two black managers, both former leading lights in NUMSA. Russel's arrival was seen as crucial, given the fact that AMEO's most experienced negotiator, Delta's George Stegmann, was holidaying in the USA.

Russel's presence led to an almost immediate shift in AMEO's position. AMEO began to indicate unofficially that it was offering 9% on actuals rather than the industry average. This had important

implications because, as NUMSA had indicated, 48% of the industry's employees earn above the industry average for their grade. This meant that they would receive only between 5% and 9% in terms of the employer's offer.

The NUMSA team, led by chief negotiator Gavin Hartford and president Mtutuzeli Tom, responded by indicating that they were prepared to delink the wage dispute and wage policy. Their proposal was to set up a study group to report no later than mid-1995 on the most efficient mechanism to overcome the 'apartheid wage gap'. This was a fundamental shift, as all NUMSA's press statements had emphasized that the dispute was not fundamentally about an annual wage increment, but about ending apartheid in the factory. In return for this delinking, NUMSA indicated it expected management to settle at 12%.

A series of meetings between a small group of employers and NUMSA representatives took place to explore the basis of a final settlement. NUMSA began to explore the possibility of 10,5%, arguing that it was mid-way between 9 and 12%. The plan was to take this back to the Shopsteward's Council and argue for a settlement at 11%.

The breaking off of talks on Tuesday led to heightened expectations that Wednesday would herald a compromise settlement. After all, the employers had moved from talking about averages to actuals and NUMSA had agreed to delink the wage policy issue from the wage offer.

On Wednesday, NUMSA offered the opening gambit by indicating that they were prepared to take a proposal of 10,5% back to the Shopsteward's Council (SSC) which was due to meet on Friday. The employers responded by proposing to shift to 10%, with the industry minimums adjusted by 12%. NUMSA indicated its dissatisfaction with this offer and argued that only 1 300 out of 25 000 workers would be affected by the industry minimums.

The employers then broke off for a lengthy caucus. Expectation on the NUMSA side was that they would settle at 10,5%. The

NUMSA negotiators were more concerned about how to sell the revised offer to the SSC. The NUMSA negotiators, with a collective working experience of 264 years in the industry and 140 yearsshop stewards were acutely aware that if negotiations with the bosses were tough, selling 10,5% to the SSC would even be tougher. Expectation was further heightened when Paul Sherman from Delta entered the negotiating chamber and asked for more time as AMEO was preparing a written document.

Late on Wednesday afternoon AMEO entered the negotiating chamber and placed its offer on the table. It confirmed its earlier offer of 10% across the board and a 12% on industry minimums. It ended its written offer with the statement "that this is a final position and not open to further negotiation or mediation". At this stage Yster en Staal, the exclusively white union, after a brief caucus, entered the fray.

Yster and Staal joins in

Earlier this year, Yster en Staal came under fire from NUMSA for being a racially exclusive union. Beyond this, NUMSA workers were upset that Yster en Staal benefitted from increases that they had struggled for.

In subsequent negotiations, Yster en Staal supported 12% but did not condone the strike. Instead they demanded that their members continue to be provided with employment during the duration of the strike, especially at the VWSA plant. The core of the union's members, some 642, were located at the plant. To this end they brought an urgent court order to force VWSA to continue paying Yster en Staal members. This court bid failed.

With AMEO's final offer on the table, Yster en Staal changed tack. It returned to the negotiating chamber and informed AMEO that it was declaring a dispute. Chanting "die stryd gaan voort", a slogan made popular by AWB leader Eugene Terblanche, and "viva NUMSA", Yster en Staal lined up on the side of NUMSA against the bosses. In a spirited attack on the employers, their chief

negotiator, Johan Prinsloo, expressed his dismay that the bosses had brought the entire industry to a standstill over wages, which made up only 4% of the industry's total cost.

While a gulf remained between Yster en Staal and NUMSA, significant shifts were taking place. Prinsloo indicated their total support for the new government. Importantly, their earlier reluctance for strike action had changed. NUMSA's attitude also began to warm. This process was greatly facilitated by an impassioned speech from Mtutuzeli Tom who harangued NUMSA workers for treating Yster en Staal with scorn and reminding them that Yster en Staal members were workers and needed to be treated with respect.

NUMSA – return to the workers

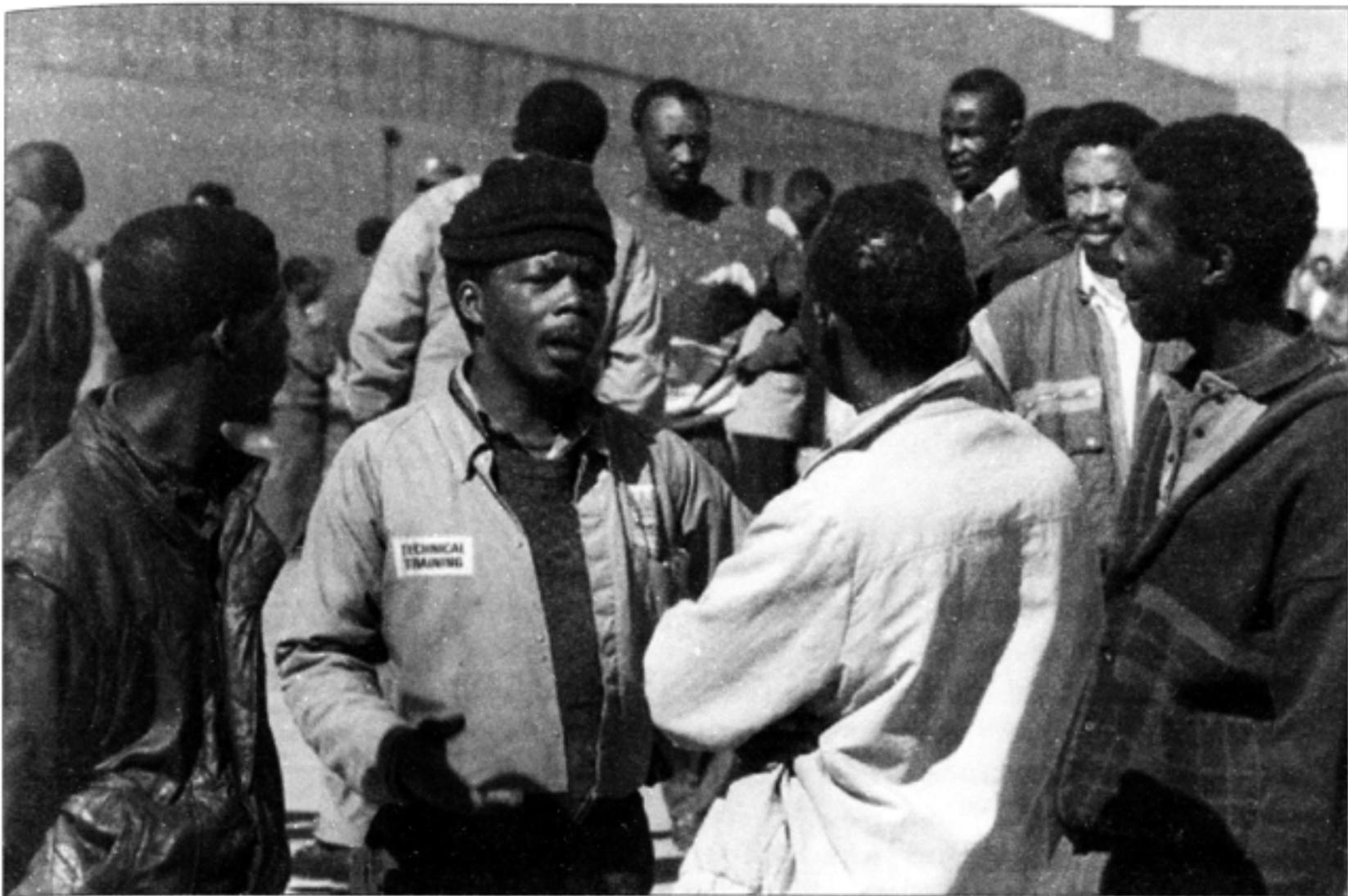
On Thursday, NUMSA organised a march of VWSA and Delta workers from its headquarters in Korsten to MCI. The march was delayed for about two hours. VWSA workers were held up as bus drivers in Uitenhage had gone on strike. Finally, some 1 500 workers marched on to the employers' headquarters. John Gomomo, COSATU president, who had worked for over 25 years in the motor industry, told the crowd

"We are accused of undermining the same government that we put into power. We reject that. What we want it is to do away with inherited apartheid, and we are going to use our forces to force the employers back to the negotiating table."

At its SSC on Friday, this is precisely what NUMSA attempted to do. While reverting back to its original demand of 12% across-the-board, NUMSA signalled that it was not against government mediation to kick-start the wage talks. In any case, with Yster en Staal declaring a dispute, the labour ministry would have to set up a Conciliation Board. While the same players would return to the negotiating table, the ministry had the right to nominate a chair.

Why deadlock

By day ten the strike had reputedly cost close to a billion rand. In addition, many of the 80 000 workers in the components industry



Discussing the strike: Samcor workers on day one of the strike

face the possibility of lay-offs (*Eastern Province Herald*, 13 August 1994). The strike comes at a time when the industry faces a struggle for its very survival in the face of imminent international competition as tariff barriers are reduced in accordance with GATT obligations.

Toyota's Harry Gazendam and AMEO's acting chair indicated that it was not a question of affordability. It was about principles. Christoph Kopke, MBSA chief executive, gave credence to the fact that it was not about affordability when he revealed that MBSA had grossed a record R435 million in July and were achieving international standards at the level of quality. Constant reference was made to SIEFSA settling with NUMSA at 9,5%. AMEO was not going to allow auto workers to breach the earnings boundary and so create a ripple effect down the line. Thus Gazendam in an obvious reference to the recall industry and the footwear industry, which settled at 12,3% and 11,5% respectively, argued that if other wage settlements in other industries were higher than 10% it was made "off a much

lower wage base" (*Evening Post*, 11 August 1994). According to Gazendam, AMEO owed it to the country to bring a coherence to its wage structure and it was in this context, the offer of 10%, was final and not open to further negotiation or mediation.

The strike remains unresolved on the basis of a 0,5% difference. However one evaluates the differing positions of AMEO and NUMSA, it is sadly ironic that at a time when both parties are close to reaching agreements that will fundamentally restructure production and work relations, a total breakdown occurs on the basis of 0,5%. Indications are that the labour ministry will prevail upon the parties to return to the negotiating table. AMEO is likely to heed this call, despite its public assertion that its 10% offer is not up for negotiation or mediation. Everything is negotiable in the new South Africa. *FB*

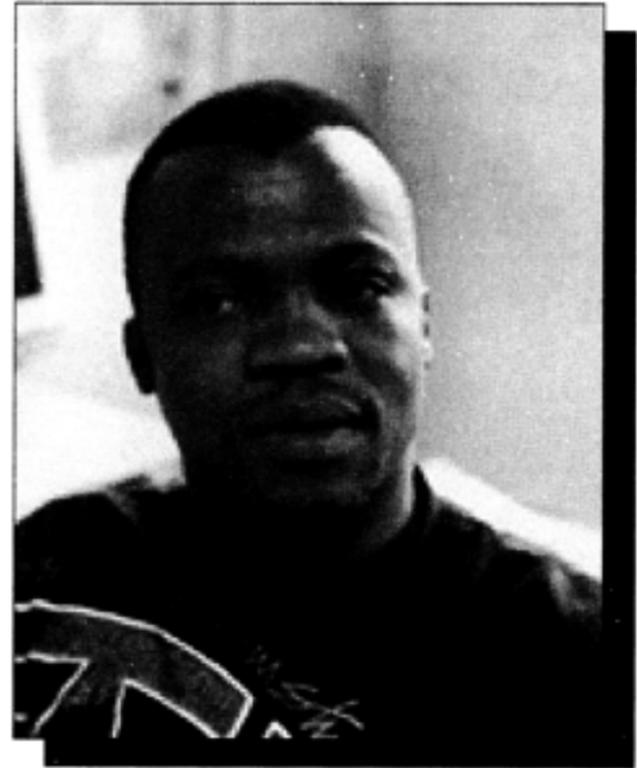
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Pick 'n Pay strike

what do shopstewards say?

The Pick 'n Pay strike was marked by outrageous police violence against workers and a wave of media hysteria about workers' action. ZOLILE MTSHELWANE spoke to shopstewards from Pietersburg, Rosebank and Norwood about the strike.



The strike started on 12 July, with some stores in the PWV embarking on go-slows which later turned into full-blown strikes. The strike was eventually settled after four weeks, with both parties agreeing on an across-the-board increase of R180 per month. This represents a 12,1% increase on the old average of R1 481 per month. The new minimum of R1 110 per month will now apply, representing a 6,6% increase on the old minimum of R1 040. Tito Mboweni, the Minister of Labour, intervened in the strike by appointing a mediator to broker an agreement between the union and management.

When negotiations broke down in May, SACCAWU was demanding an across the board increase of R229 per month, while Pick 'n Pay had tabled an offer with three options: an increase of R175 from 1 March for 16 months, a 15-months increase of R165 also from 1 March, or a R175 increase from 1 March to May 1995.

The strike by more than 15 000 Pick 'n Pay workers over a wage increase turned ugly when management called in police to evict picketing strikers from about 136 shops nationwide. This was after management had obtained court interdicts instructing strikers to remain at a distance of 500 metres from some of the shops affected by the dispute.

A consistent pattern that emerged immediately after the granting of interdicts was the outrageously violent intervention of police on the side of management in many stores. The police stormed stores to evict strikers, shooting stun grenades and rubber bullets at workers, setting dogs loose to attack strikers and the subsequent arrests of hundreds, if not thousands of the striking workers.

Lepola Mokgopi, SACCAWU's organiser in Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal, said the manager of a store there had told the union he had received instructions from the company's head office to call in the police in the event of strikers defying the interdicts. Stalin Manyaka, the co-ordinating

shopsteward at the Norwood hypermarket in Johannesburg, corroborated this, saying that the store manager had told them he had received a directive from the company head office to call in the police.

Dogs, shooting, beating

Manyaka said that the workers at Norwood were picketing and singing outside the store when police arrived on 13 July. "There was no worker who intimidated customers or non-striking labour. As soon as the police arrived, they ordered us to disperse. We refused," Manyaka said.

Manyaka said that police then started shooting at strikers and set their dogs loose in the pandemonium that followed. "The entire workforce of approximately 400 workers was arrested and were charged with trespassing, and about 25 workers suffered rubber bullet wounds, baton weals and dog bites." Manyaka claimed that the order to shoot did not come from any of the senior police officers on the scene. "We know for a fact that this order came from two managers of the store, and we know who they are," Manyaka said, adding that workers started fighting back after this unprovoked action by the police.

Manyaka said that about four workers are still recovering from their injuries, and one of the four has a rubber bullet stuck in her leg. He said that this might lead to the worker being paralysed, as doctors claim they have no knowledge of this kind of bullet. In the first days of the strike, the media reported that nearly 700 workers had been arrested on charges arising out of defying the Industrial Court interdicts, and at least 60 workers were injured. The injuries ranged from rubber bullet wounds to dog bites and baton weals.

In Pietersburg, about 250 workers were arrested twice in five days. Mokgopi said workers were first charged for trespassing after staging a sit-in on 13 July, and charged with intimidation after being arrested on 18 July.

Mokgopi also said that ten women workers were stripped naked in a Louis Trichardt police station and forced to frog jump while being assaulted. "The union has laid charges against policemen," Mokgopi

said, adding that the union will meet with the provincial MEC for safety and security about this issue on 16 August. "We want the provincial government to take appropriate action against these culprits."

Old management, old police: new SA?

SACCAWU officials have also expressed concern at the "apparent co-ordination" of police action against strikers. The officials said they were left wondering whether Pick 'n Pay management had struck a deal with police to move in on workers.

The police's role in intervening on the side of management presents serious problems for the rebuilding of healthy workplace relations between workers and management. Workers are now asking whether anything has changed at all. Before the new government was voted into power, the employers could always rely on the police.

Now, even under a new government, Pick 'n Pay management has resorted to the same tactics, and the police have played the same ball game. They intervened on behalf of management, set dogs on strikers, fired teargas into police vans loaded with arrested workers, charged workers with intimidation, trespassing, etc. So, what's new? the workers ask.

SACCAWU said blame for the violence should be put at management's and the police's door. The union claimed that there was no violence until the company called in the police to the stores. At the height of the strike, management wanted the union to sign an agreement on strike behaviour, arguing that strikers were intimidating shoppers as well as non-strikers. SACCAWU, after initially entering these talks, pulled out and did not sign the agreement. The union argued that there was disagreement with management as to what constitutes legitimate industrial action. Manyaka said as far as he was concerned, striking workers' behaviour was not the issue. "The issue was for management to meet our demand and to stop involving police in industrial matters.

Had management not called in the police, there would not have been violence.”

Managers and workers

One of the terms of the strike settlement states that SACCAWU and management need to negotiate a framework to rebuild the relationship at the workplace. But Manyaka said the damage at Norwood is so big that there is no communication at all between workers and management at the store. “We have presented a memorandum of demands to management to clarify a number of issues,” Manyaka said. “We want them to tell us who in the head office instructed them to call the police, and secondly we want them to identify the person who gave the order to shoot. We also need to know what happened to the property of workers lost during the stampede, and this includes pay packets as the attack

happened after we got paid.”

According to Mokgopi the store manager at one Northern Transvaal store, who was on leave during the strike, resigned from the company as soon as she returned to work. “The manager returned to work shortly before the end of the strike. When the workers started a return to work, she said that she did not see her way clear to working with people who had intimidated customers and still get their jobs back.”

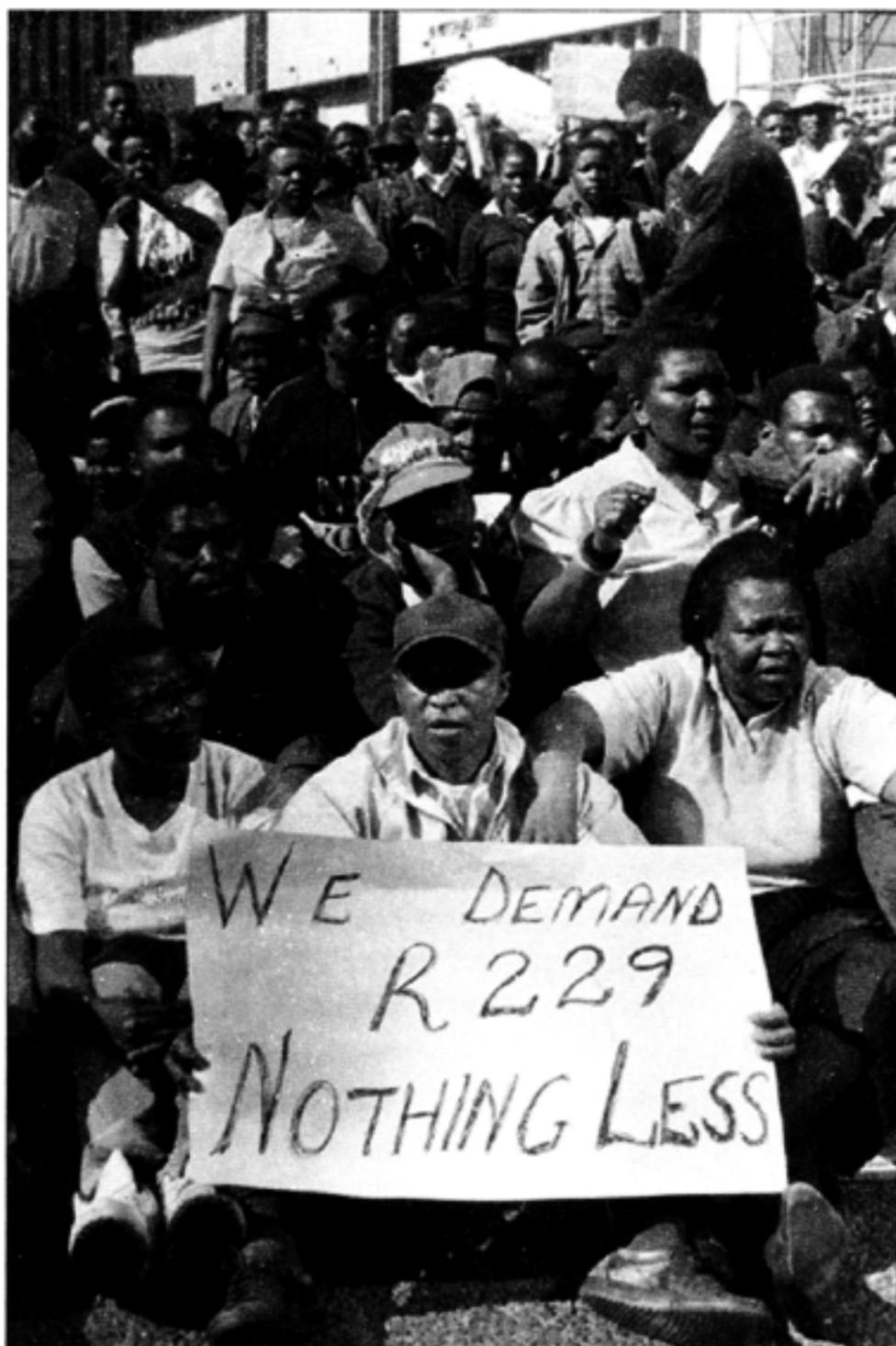
The Rosebank store is one of a few where the police did not attack workers. Shopsteward Judith Ndlovu said this might be attributed to a rumour that the owner of the building in which the store is housed had told Pick 'n Pay he does not want any police dogs in the premises. “Our manager was also not hostile towards workers during the strike. As soon as the police arrived, shopstewards

pretended to be on the phone to someone, and would come out and claim that they had spoken to the Minister of Police, who had expressed surprise at the presence of his police in the store.”

“Entrenched racism”

The bitterness amongst the Pick 'n Pay workers also relates to what workers call “entrenched racism” in the company. Shopstewards constantly referred to “racially biased promotions” and “selective discipline” applied by management in different stores. Mogale Bagale (not his real name), a shopsteward at a Pietersburg store, said the entry point for many white workers in the company is at the level of trainee manager. “We are then expected to show the particular employee how the whole system operates, and after some time, this white employee is then appointed our superior, with the powers to discipline and even fire us,” Bagale said.

Bagale said he has worked for Pick 'n Pay since 1984. Other



shopstewards complained of being ignored for promotion.

SACCAWU said it is an illusion that Pick 'n Pay management is among the most enlightened of employers. "Pick 'n Pay is still largely a white dominated, highly paternalistic and authoritarian company in terms of its interaction with workers. The daily lives of workers on the Pick 'n Pay shopfloors bear no resemblance to the public image of Pick 'n Pay created by management and labour commentators."

Asked why the workers had not gone on a national wage strike since 1986, Ndlovu said negotiations in those years had yielded better results than this year's talks. "Even though the increases we received in those years were not high, they were, however, reasonable and near what we had expected," Ndlovu said.

SACCAWU has dismissed criticisms that the union has weak leadership. Manyaka said this criticism emanates from management, who are bent on discrediting SACCAWU. "The union, for us, is the organisation at the factory floor, and not officials," he said. "Any organisation, whether it be business or a union, has its own peculiar problems. SACCAWU is alive and strong in the workplace, and our strike had no political demands, but was based on our genuine demands for a higher wage increase."

The settlement of a R180 increase is nowhere near the R229 that was demanded by the union. The increase will be effective for a 15-month period, from March this year up to June 1995. Although this is not necessarily a victory for the workers, it is neither a victory for management.

The relations between customers and the workers have been affected by the strike. Although it is difficult to gauge the response of customers to the strikes, Manyaka said that the relations between workers at the Norwood store and customers during the strike were bad. "Many of the rich customers were very hostile to the strikers, and some of them even used abusive language against us," Manyaka said. Manyaka said it will be difficult for most workers at the store to be courteous to

people who called them ugly names during the strike. Ndlovu, however, said they found some of the customers sympathetic to the workers' cause during the strike. "One regular customer, who is not poor, left her full trolley unpaid for after we told her what our strike was all about."

Now that the strike is over, workers and management are going to be squaring up to each other. Certainly both parties will want to assert their power and rights. As Manyaka said, management's decision to call in the police has hardened workers' attitudes. "The workers are more militant and angry than they were before the strike."

Management will most certainly also be wanting to enforce its authority over workers. What is in doubt is the degree to which they can do this without provoking the workers and thus reopening the wounds that have not yet healed.

Some shopstewards believe that the post-strike tensions on the shopfloor are going to take some time to settle down. However, there is no consensus on what effect these tensions will have on the job security and flexibility agreement that the union hailed as a dawn of a new era in worker/management relations at Pick 'n Pay (see *SA Labour Bulletin vol 18 no 2*).

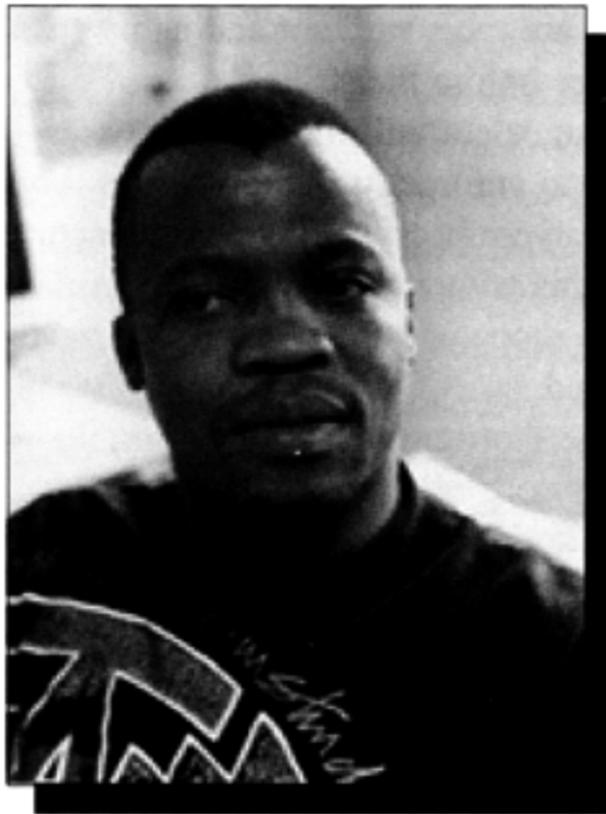
Some believe it will be difficult for the workers to co-operate with customers who were unsympathetic to their cause, and to normalise relations with employers who "criminalised" their strike. Other shopstewards are convinced that the strike has "horrified" management, to an extent that they have realised the deep-seated anger of workers on the shopfloor.

One thing is certain, however. The myth that Pick 'n Pay takes good care of its workers has been exposed as a publicity stunt by the owners of the company and their spokespersons. The irony is that it needed a bitter strike for the myth to be exploded.

This friction will be balanced by the mutual need that both parties have of each other. It will be interesting to watch developments in the relations between these two forces in the near and distant future. *FB*

Labour-intensive development

new questions for unions



Last year COSATU, SANCO and construction employers signed a Framework Agreement governing labour-intensive projects. The aim was to provide jobs and community infrastructure at low cost. One such project is underway at Bloekomsbos in the Western Cape. ZOLILE MTSHELWANE investigated.

Bloekomsbos squatter camp in Kraaifontein in the Western Cape is like any other shack settlement. A total of 448 households live in shelters made of wood, corrugated iron and bricks. There are no roads, running water, flush toilets or electricity. Unemployment is a major problem. Those who are lucky get seasonal work on nearby farms.

However, the plight of this community might improve, if the National Co-ordinating Committee for Labour Intensive Construction (NCLIC) has its way (see box on p 67). Or will it?

About 450 Bloekomsbos residents have been employed in a labour intensive construction project since January this year. The project's aim is to develop a piece of land across the road from the present settlement. The area has about 400 sites, and once the infrastructure has been set up, the community will move there. The R18-million project is guaranteed by the Cape Provincial Administration (CPA), which also bought the land and gave it to the community under surety.

The heavy machinery usually present at construction sites is conspicuous by its absence. The Bloekomsbos project keeps the use of machinery to a minimum. This is in keeping with the Framework Agreement, under whose auspices the project has been initiated. Most of the work is done manually under the supervision of skilled personnel from the

construction companies. This includes digging trenches, laying pipes and manufacturing bricks used in the construction of toilets and kerbs.

Labourers on the project were selected by the local community development forum and the community liaison officer appointed by residents. The development forum consists of representatives from organisations in the community. These include the local branches of the ANC, SANCO, the ANC Women's League and the Youth League.

The two main criteria for selecting labourers are that they are residents of the community, and have at least a standard six education. However, the latter criterion has not been followed strictly, as an estimated 60% of residents are illiterate. Had the education criterion been strictly enforced, most residents would have been disqualified from participating in the project and denied an opportunity to earn badly-needed cash. Contractors in the project raised concern about the level of illiteracy amongst the labourers.

As there are no other basic conditions of employment provided for in the Framework Agreement for such projects, there does not seem to be a check on the age and health of workers who participate in the project. There are reports, for example, of pregnant women – desperate for some income – being employed in the project. According to unconfirmed reports, one woman miscarried and an old man drafted his children to help him complete his tasks on a regular basis.

By the time the project ends in about November this year, nearly R2,5 million will have been ploughed into the community in the form of remuneration, according to Graham Power, managing director of Power Contractors, one of the companies involved in the project. When the residents move into the 400 sites at the end of November, it will be a far cry from their present settlement. There will be running water for each household, roads, storm water and drainage pipes, as well as flush toilets.

The Framework Agreement

The Framework Agreement was signed on 22 June 1993. Parties to the agreement are COSATU, SANCO and the National Committee for Labour Intensive Construction (NCLIC).

The main features of the agreement are:

- The employment of people rather than machines;
- Community involvement in planning a project and its implementation;
- Improvement of services to the community;
- Training including managerial and administrative training, as well as general education like literacy and numeracy; and
- Task-based remuneration.

The NCLIC is made up of the following:

- The SA Institute of Civil Engineers
- The SA Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
- The Institution of Municipal Engineers of SA
- The SA Association of Consulting Engineers, and
- The Southern Africa Road Federation.

But once the project is over, its workers will again struggle to make ends meet, as chances of getting employment elsewhere are not guaranteed. But, until then, the 450 labourers will have money to buy food for their families.

The project boasts a core team of supervisors who received three weeks training before work started in November last year. The rest of the labourers received about eight days training in digging trenches, laying pipes, building bricks for the toilets, manufacturing kerbs for the roads and so on. The workers were then divided into different teams with specific tasks. Power's contracts manager, Jacques du Preez, says ongoing on-site training is also given. The training is accredited by the

Western Cape Training Centre, which issues certificates to workers on completion of their training.

However, according to Power, training would not be transferrable within the industry. "These skills are only relevant within labour intensive construction projects," he said.

Conflict over payment

While the project is putting money into workers' pockets, the form of payment has been a thorny issue. The Framework Agreement stipulates that payment on labour intensive construction projects should be task-based. According to du Preez, a particular target for each team is set every morning. This is done in a meeting between the workers, supervisors and the contracts manager before work starts in the morning.

Although the target is the equivalent of a day's work, du Preez said workers can leave work as soon as they have completed their task, or start another task. The completion of a task depends on factors such as how fast a worker does his/her work and the nature of the task.

When work started on the project in January, payment was fixed at R25 on the completion of a task. This was increased to R27,50 from June after residents besieged the construction site offices on 6 May. Their main demand was that they be paid for a number of public holidays. Although the companies involved in the project tried to explain that the Framework Agreement does not provide for this, the residents insisted that they must be paid, failing which they would withhold their labour power. Workers also demanded an increase in the task-based payment rate, to compensate for the fact that there were no other benefits like UIF and pension.

According to Basil Neftt of SANCO, the construction companies paid workers for public holidays – a total of R70 000. Then they moved out of Bloekomsbos and the project came to a standstill for about two weeks.

Neftt said SANCO then initiated negotiations with the companies to persuade them to return to the project. "But the companies wanted guarantees that there would be no more disruptions of the project," Neftt said. They also wanted refunds from workers for the money paid for public holidays in the form of deductions from their pay. In the end, Neftt said, the companies agreed that voting days would be fully paid for. Workers would therefore repay the company about R45 000 – about R100 each.

Power said they had learnt a lesson from the dispute. "We have realised that we need to put in place a conflict resolution mechanism at the start of any project similar to the Bloekomsbos one." He remained optimistic: "We think the positive factors in this project far outweigh the negatives," he said.

Du Preez also seeks to underplay the dispute: "This incident happened on a Friday afternoon when most of the labourers had had one too much," he said.

The community appointed Neftt as a monitor on the project to prevent any future dispute from escalating into a disruption of the project.

Community conflict

All parties stress community involvement is vital to the successful completion of the project. Power said there was a three to four week consultation programme with the community in November last year.

The aim of this, according to Power, was to conduct a survey of skills available in the community and to inform the community on how the project would operate and to allow input from the community. Power believes that this project is useful: "The community will feel proud that they built the infrastructure for the township themselves."

Although the community has a development forum, there have been conflicts since before the project started. Neftt said these have taken different forms at different times. At one time the conflict was between the local branches of SANCO

and the ANC; at another time, it was between those employed in the project and those who are not. Then there was the conflict between the whole community and the contractors, like when the offices were besieged in May.

Neftt said there was even violent conflict between sections of the community over which organisation should be the main player in the project. "These conflicts were mainly caused by a misunderstanding about the project. However, the major cause of conflict in underprivileged communities is about resources, access thereto and the control of such resources," Neftt said. This violent conflict, according to sources, led to some people fleeing the settlement.

According to Neftt, despite having a development forum, the Bloekomsbos community still needs a lot of guidance in deepening its understanding of developmental issues. At present, the immediate benefits are seen as a priority and there is no global approach regarding the use of limited resources for development.

Does the union have a role?

The role of the Construction and Allied Workers Union (CAWU) in the project is minimal, if any. According to Lulamile Mqikela, Western Cape secretary of CAWU, the project's workers are not members of his union. However, he said, workers from the project have approached the union with their grievances. "The most common of these grievances is the task-based remuneration which workers consider as too little and exploitative," he said.

Co-ordination between COSATU, its affiliates and SANCO in the Western Cape in implementing these projects in terms of the Framework Agreement seem to be shaky. Newton Adams, SANCO's Western Cape head of organising, acknowledged a lack of co-ordination between the civic movement and the unions. He blamed this on a lack of financial resources available to community-based organisations.

A major point of friction is the role of unions in developmental projects. CAWU general secretary Matthews Olifant, for example, said his union will organise workers in these labour-intensive construction projects, to fight against the casualisation of labour and the danger of undermining the security of employed workers.

However, Mqikela said CAWU has no intention of organising workers in labour-intensive projects in the Western Cape. Although Mqikela would not give reasons for this 'hands-off' attitude, sources said that some elements within SANCO in the region have 'warned' unionists to keep out of these local projects.

It has also been suggested that tensions between COSATU and SANCO in the Western Cape are very high, and communication between them is strained. The main reason for this, sources say, is a perception among COSATU activists that SANCO's region is determined to push through its projects, regardless of principled objections by COSATU on



issues like payment and conditions of employment.

Re-evaluating the farmworkers agreement

While CAWU had two representatives in the COSATU delegation on the National Co-ordinating Committee on labour-intensive construction, it does not seem as though proper mandating and report backs happened between these representatives and different union structures.

Olifant said the two CAWU officials who were part of the COSATU delegation which negotiated the agreement did not carry the union's mandate. "They were representing COSATU, and they carried no mandate from our union. In fact, CAWU was not invited to be a signatory to the Framework Agreement," Olifant said. The two officials have since left CAWU – one is an MEC in the Western Cape and the other works in this MEC's office.

Mqikela said his union wants the Framework Agreement to be amended to include the payment of industry-stipulated minimum wage rates in these projects and the extension of basic conditions of employment.

Although Olifant believes the Framework Agreement is an honest attempt to address the developmental needs in underprivileged areas, he said CAWU has problems with aspects of it. "Before the Agreement was signed, CAWU informed COSATU of its objections to the task-based payment system," Olifant said. For him, it "encourages a return to an age of semi-slavery. But the biggest problem with this kind of payment is that it puts older workers at a disadvantage. For example, it is not possible that a 40-year-old man can complete a task as fast as a 25-year-old worker does. The question of checking that older people don't bring their children to help them complete a task also comes into play," Olifant said.

Olifant confirms that CAWU has established a sub-committee to re-evaluate the Framework Agreement. He argued that

his union's approach is that all unions in the construction industry should be involved when the Framework Agreement is due for review in October. He said CAWU and the Black Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU) will be meeting with the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW) to formulate a joint approach to the Framework Agreement, especially in relation to the task-based remuneration and other conditions of work. The building of new houses in the PWV province, for example, necessitates the involvement of unions in this process, he added.

No attempt to encourage entrepreneurs

Power acknowledged that his company had made no attempt to identify and encourage people from the community who have the potential to become small contractors. When the project is finished, his company will move on to do other work elsewhere.

SANCO's Adams, however, believes that black entrepreneurs should be empowered, as they would usually do the same job as the big contractors, albeit with lower overhead costs. "We should use the expertise of these companies to build capacity in our communities," Adams said, adding that the skilled labour in underprivileged communities should be given resources to undertake developmental projects.

Adams said some companies were prepared to help build capacity in underprivileged communities and to help empower black entrepreneurs. However, there is a catch. Companies want a trade-off for their efforts, and this revolves around paying lower remuneration packages. This might heighten tensions between these companies, trade unions and SANCO, as all of them will want to pursue their own objectives to the fullest. The communities over whom these battles are being fought will be caught in the middle.

CAWU's Olifant did not want to be drawn on the question of empowering



emergent and prospective black contractors. "We are not champions of business, whether they be black or white," he said. "We don't want to confuse issues. We are champions of worker rights."

Development without jobs?

The Bloekomsbos labourers, armed with certificates from the WCTC, will effectively be without jobs in December when the project comes to an end. Not only that, they will be glorified labourers who have installed infrastructure for their township, but stand a very slim chance of being employable within the civil engineering and construction industries, certificates and all.

The improvement of living conditions of the poorest of the poor is one of the aims of the RDP. The Bloekomsbos project, everyone agrees, is an attempt at implementing this goal. There is definite benefit for a community whose living conditions can best be described as shameful.

However, the concern about the lack of further employment for the community after

the completion of this project poses a big challenge for the local development forum. The developed area, after the community has moved in, will most probably still consist of informal structures. This is because the majority of residents of Bloekomsbos have no money to build proper houses, nor will they qualify for subsidies to buy building materials in terms of the new housing subsidy scheme.

The Bloekomsbos community, although it will still be poor after the completion of the project, will most certainly be enriched by its experience. One of these experiences is the manner in which communities can be divided by the inflow of developmental resources. This community will hopefully be more vigilant and better organised in future to deal more creatively with problems related to projects aimed at improving their lives. Another of these experiences is that a community should extract maximum advantage to its benefit out of development agencies, in the form of acquiring tangible and sustainable skills that will forever belong to the community. *R*



Durban municipal workers

Black worker, brown burden

municipal workers and the environment

Municipal workers deal with environmental issues every day – blocked sewage, dead dogs, rubbish disposal. They and their unions could be at the forefront of environmental struggles – linking the workplace, the community and nature, argues DAVID McDONALD*.

* David McDonald is a Canadian researcher working in South Africa

Linking health and safety in the workplace to environmental concerns is a concept that has slowly taken root in South African unions over the past five years. Incidents like the one at Thor Chemicals bring into sharp focus just how much environmentalists and unions have in common.

But what exactly does this mean in practice? What should unions do to get into the environmental debate? How interested are workers themselves?

This article looks at one union in particular – the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) – and offers some concrete ideas based on interviews with 72 labourers. Unions obviously differ across sectors and across regions, but the data from this research should contribute to a better understanding of the environmental concerns and ideas of workers in general.

Defining the environment

I will not go into a detailed discussion here about the need for an expanded definition of “the environment”, enough has been written on this already. Let me simply say that the environment is not limited to *nature*. The living space and working space of *people* are just as much a part of our environment as Kruger Park or Table Mountain. I would however like to introduce some terminology that helps to conceptualise a widening of the definition of ecology: *green* and *brown*.

Green is used here to refer to conventional notions of the environment: conserving wildlife; saving trees; protecting the ozone layer. These are very important issues, but not necessarily priorities for many people. *Brown* is a better description of the environmental issues that affect the majority of South Africans – more immediate and life threatening concerns like blocked sewage pipes, smoky factory floors, and lack of open spaces.

The most critical environmental concerns in this country are obviously the brown ones. People must have a safe and healthy place to live and work. But what makes brown concerns that much more significant is the way they impact on green issues. Having millions of people without toilets contaminates rivers and

kills marine life. Poor safety standards in a factory can cause toxic materials to leak, affecting workers as well as other people, plants, and animals. Far from being separate, green and brown environmental issues are closely linked to one another.

Tackling brown environmental issues (and the poverty and oppression that are their root cause) generally means an improvement in green ecology as well. Workers can play an important role in this link. By demanding better safety standards in the workplace, they can put pressure on managers for less toxic raw materials, better disposal techniques, cleaner technology, etc. This helps improve the workers’ environment, and the environment around them. As Alec Erwin and Rod Crompton (1991) put it: “Trade union struggles for health and safety in the workplace constitute the first line of defence for an embattled environment.”

SAMWU’s unique position

Municipal workers too can play a part in this “first line of defence”. A number of hazardous materials used by municipalities are dangerous to both the workers and the environment at large, and workers can insist that safer alternatives are used. One example is the toxic sprays used to control weeds along sidewalks and verges.

For the most part, though, municipal workers are at the receiving end rather than the producing end of waste. Their raw materials are what comes down the pipes, and there is little they can do about it. But, rather than limiting the environmental role that municipal workers can play, this position at ‘the end of the pipes’ makes them much more important.

Municipal workers handle effluence from industry, contaminated food from restaurants, dead dogs on the streets, residential and commercial refuse, and clogged sewage drains. They even plant trees and clear alien vegetation. These workers are at the hub of a gigantic environmental wheel, and have a much broader environmental vantage point than other unions.

SAMWU could use this unique vantage point in at least two important ways. First, it



Polluted lives, polluted nature: Alexandra scenic view

could link up with other unions (for example, chemical workers) to jointly protest against hazardous substances that affect workers at both ends of the pipe. Second, municipal workers could act as environmental watchdogs of a sort – reporting any major problems that they come across in their work. This would help to forge alliances with a broad spectrum of environmental groups as well as the communities that they serve.

SAMWU and its members are well situated to make an important contribution to the environmental debate. They are large enough and well enough organised to make sure their opinions on environmental policy are heard. They also have the capacity to back their convictions up with protest or strike action. As one worker told me: “We can toyi-toyi if there is air pollution.”

Interview with workers

None of this can be dictated by academia. The union and the workers themselves have to be willing to put in the time and energy it will take to develop environmental policy positions.

The following is a brief summary of interviews over the past ten months with 72 labourers from three municipalities in the greater Cape Town area. The interviews were designed to hear what workers have to say – how interested they are, and what degree of environmental (both green and brown) knowledge the workers may already have.

Workers were selected at random, interviewed at their place of work, and in their own language. Forty-eight were coloured workers, twenty-three were African. There was only one white labourer. Ninety-five percent of the workers were male. Unfortunately, there were not enough women in the three municipalities to say anything about gender. All workers were from the Parks & Forests, Drainage and Sewerage, and Cleansing branches.

So as not to predefine “the environment” for workers, and hence their responses, they were given the chance to express what the environment means to them. This allowed for a wide range of replies and let workers talk about green ecology, brown ecology, or whatever else came to mind (quite a few

spoke about gangs as an environmental problem). Only after this initial discussion were they asked questions specifically related to green and brown issues.

As could be expected, the primary environmental concerns of workers are brown ones. They are concerned about the health and safety of themselves and their families. By and large, workers see "the environment" in very concrete terms – as the place where you live and work, not as some abstract concept of nature.

Eighty-nine percent of workers made reference to brown issues right from the beginning of the interview. Virtually all of them were concerned with unhealthy living conditions, while 75% spoke about unhealthy working conditions.

Far fewer workers spoke about green environmental concerns, with only 22% of the workers bringing up green issues on their own. Nevertheless, when asked specific questions about green ecology, 81% said they were aware of the various problems mentioned and had comments to make on deforestation, water pollution, etc.

There were significant differences along racial lines however. African workers were much more articulate and intense about brown concerns. They were more knowledgeable about the extent to which their work environment impacts on their health, and about how poorly equipped their local authority is to deal with the brown environmental problems in the townships they live and work in. African workers were much more politicised in general, even drawing clear links between apartheid planning and environmental degradation; something that very few coloured workers did.

On the other hand, coloured workers were much more aware of green issues than their African counterparts. In fact, the interview structure had to be altered after some initial pilot tests. We had not expected workers to be raising concerns like saving the whales or protecting sand dunes, but coloured workers were. African workers did not demonstrate the same degree or scope of interest in green ecology.

Environmental workshops

The municipal workers interviewed for this research were very keen to learn more about environmental issues – particularly as they relate to health and safety. It is important, however, to use appropriate educational programmes, and this will take some time to develop.

The following points outline possible themes for environmental education for municipal workers, and how it could be funded.

Reaching the workers

It is important that as many workers as possible are aware of the green/brown environmental links discussed in the attached article. There is no point in having a few really keyed-up people developing policy statements for the union if the membership has no idea what they are talking about. Workers themselves should be aware of their own role in the environment, and how their own health and safety fits into this broader picture. Ideally, this education would entail shopfloor meetings that encourage discussion amongst workers.

Union driven

The education should be union driven. Ecology is a political issue and it is essential that the interests and perspectives of workers are a central theme. There are a number of progressive environmental groups throughout the country whose knowledge should be tapped into, but the union must develop its own internal expertise as well. Only then can a really productive coalition evolve between unions and environmental groups.

Association with community

Workshops should be conducted in the language that workers are most comfortable with. They will learn more and be better able to express themselves. This also gives people in the townships insight into the labour

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component of dealing with brown environmental issues, and helps develop further links between the union and the community. There are a growing number of township-based environmental groups which can provide people to fill these positions (for example, Khayelitsha Environmental Action Group).

Two-way learning

Perhaps the most important element of an education programme is ensuring that workers have an opportunity to voice their own concerns and ideas. Their knowledge of brown issues is an environmental 'expertise' in its own right and should be promoted as such. Education should be an empowering process, not a humiliating one. The task of the workshop facilitator is simply to provide information on green environmental issues, and how brown issues are linked to these.

Funding

Funding the workshops could take one of three routes. The first would be to insist that the municipalities pay for it. After all, they send managers on all sorts of environmentally related courses. This funding would take quite a while to get in place, however, and it may compromise the political tone of the education.

The second option is to use donor funding. The union could set itself a one or two year horizon to use the aid money, after which the educational and policy programmes become the responsibility of the union and are fully integrated into the mainstream structures of the union (health and safety would be a good example, but SAMWU is still in the process of getting this department off the ground).

The third option is a combination of the first two. Use donor funding to establish environmental programmes catering to the needs of the union in the short term, with the objective of having it become a permanent responsibility of the municipality after a couple of years. *R*

The reasons for the differences in green awareness seem fairly clear. Ninety-two percent of the coloured workers said they get their environmental information from the media (local newspapers, television shows), as opposed to just over half of the African workers. Almost 25% of coloured workers made specific reference to a weekly television programme called 50/50, with comments like "I never miss the show". Environmental media reports are almost exclusively green oriented, and are almost entirely in English and Afrikaans. Many of the African workers do not have televisions, and most are only comfortable with Xhosa. Some are illiterate.

Moreover, coloured workers earn up to 100% more than African workers doing the same jobs (in different municipalities). Many of them spoke about going to the beach in their spare time, hiking on Table Mountain, and even going to national parks. African workers spoke about cleaning their yards and going to funerals. They do not have the resources or the access to transportation for recreational activities in "nature", and hence have not had the experience of green ecology in general.

Explaining the different awareness levels of African and coloured workers over brown environmental issues is not so straight forward. Coloured townships certainly are in much better shape than African townships, and coloured workers generally have better protective gear and safety standards, but these differences are only relative. Coloured townships are a disgrace compared to the white areas of Cape Town, and coloured municipal labourers work in appalling conditions. Why coloured workers are not more upset with their living and working environments, and why they are generally not as politicised as their African counterparts remains a complex question, with implications well beyond this subject matter.

I do not want to dwell on these different perceptions, but they do illustrate quite nicely how even a relatively small difference in income and lifestyles can change someone's awareness and interests in ecology.

The more important point to stress here is

that the overwhelming majority of workers interviewed are very interested in "the environment". Conventional wisdom would have it that workers have more important things to be concerned about, but when the definition of ecology is opened up to reflect its true meaning, it is clear that workers have a lot to say on the topic.

Environment education

Regardless of their levels of awareness of green and brown ecology, virtually all the workers interviewed were very enthusiastic about talking to us. For most, it was the first time they had ever discussed how their work relates to other problems they see around them and many openly expressed a desire to learn more about environmental issues in general. Ninety percent of the workers felt that the union has a responsibility to provide its members with environmental education, and to take a position on environmental problems.

If SAMWU is to take up environmental education, it should focus on the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation. This is where awareness levels are lowest. A full three quarters of those interviewed made no connection whatsoever between green and brown issues – even after being given examples of how this link may occur. For those that did make the link, it was often just a comment in passing.

In teaching workers more about green ecology, it must be made clear that green environmental problems are politically and economically related to a wide range of other problems that workers are already familiar with – poor housing, unemployment, insufficient services. Not only will this give them a truer account of South Africa's environmental crisis, it will demonstrate to them just how crucial their role as municipal labourers is. Fully informed workers will be better able to articulate their concerns on ecology to managers, and can contribute to and support their union in related policy matters.

Non-wage gains for municipal workers

Education for workers is not the only area that

SAMWU could act on. SAMWU could use environmental issues to secure non-wage gains for its members. Receiving an acceptable living wage is of central importance to workers, and I am not suggesting that the following ideas act as substitutes, but there is a lot of scope for environmentally related non-wage gains, with important material and psychological benefits for workers.

The most obvious of these non-wage gains is improved health and safety in the workplace. The banning of certain chemical sprays has been mentioned already, but SAMWU should not limit itself to concerns over raw materials. They can call for safe methods as well.

One example of this is refuse collection. Anyone who has been to Cape Town would surely have noticed the profusion of blue dirt bins for litter – there are 30 000 of them in the city. Municipal managers are very pleased with their effort to 'Keep the Cape in Shape', but no one seems to have considered (or cared) how the bins would be emptied. There is no release mechanism on the bottom or sides, so workers have to reach in and pull the trash out by hand – broken glass, rotten fruit, and all. The workers are given gloves, but this gives them terrible rashes in the heat. The city may be greener because of these bins, but the working environment remains dangerous.

A similar story applies to the bucket system. Although the use of buckets is an environmental improvement over people having to use the bush as a toilet, it results in one of the most unhealthy and unpleasant jobs imaginable. If working conditions are unacceptable, then so is the environmental planning behind it.

Developing more worker-friendly ways of providing environmental services will require the involvement of workers. They are the ones who do the actual work. They know where many of the safety problems are and have practical ideas on how best to alleviate or eliminate them.

Involving workers in the design and planning of municipal services could also help with the better provision of services in general. Municipal workers have an intimate knowledge of brown environmental issues.

They know every nook and cranny of the squatter camps and townships – where the sewage problems are, where refuse collection is most needed – and they can contribute to designing the most effective and efficient systems to tackle these problems.

These kinds of basic participatory experiences go beyond health and safety. They are empowering and democratising. It gives workers a chance to apply their brown environmental expertise, while at the same time exposing them to the broader environmental context within which they operate. Collecting dead dogs on the streets will never be a glamorous job, but understanding the broader environmental significance of what one does and being given an opportunity to voice one's opinion can go a long way to giving a worker a sense of pride and responsibility.

Having a workforce that feels it is making an important contribution to the improvement of the environment can lead to significant productivity gains as well. This would seem to be specifically true if workers can apply this energy to their own communities. Workers from the black local authority in particular showed a remarkable desire to do a better job for the community they worked in – if only they could have adequate resources to do what was needed and a top management structure that listened to what they had to say. There was a sense of determination and commitment from these workers that was not evident from those servicing the wealthy white suburbs.

Getting involved in the broader environmental debate

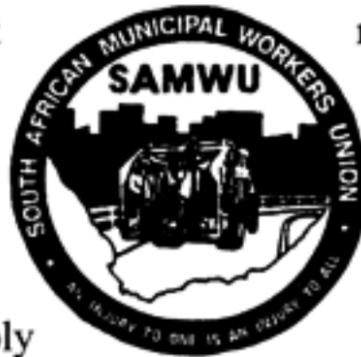
SAMWU should also take the initiative to get involved in the environmental debate on a broader level. As representatives of what is arguably the most important environmental workforce in the country, SAMWU should be in the forefront of debates on ecology – particularly as they relate to the provision of services.

A good place to start would be in the

metropolitan negotiating forums, where SAMWU can use environmental arguments to push for a more equitable and efficient use of municipal resources. It is essential, for example, that someone raise the environmental consequences of having one refuse vehicle for every 4 000 people in white areas while there is only one refuse vehicle for every 75 000 people in a black area. Not only does this imbalance affect the living standards in the townships, it undermines the environmental integrity of the city as a whole. There will never be an effective integrated waste management plan while these sorts of imbalances continue.

With a few notable exceptions, most environmental groups in South Africa, and most municipal bureaucrats for that matter, are very green-oriented when it comes to ecology. Their environmental concerns

revolve more around saving a vleibank or protecting sand dunes. There is an urgent need for an alternative voice that can push the concept of a brown environmental agenda and tie this in to local government restructuring.



Conclusion

Whether it be non-wage gains at work or health and safety issues in the townships, municipal workers and their unions can play an important role in the development of appropriate environmental policies. The workers themselves are keen to learn more about their role in the broader environmental scheme of things, and this bodes well for the future involvement of SAMWU in environmental debates.

I have tried to convey in this article a sense of ecology which goes beyond the strict boundaries that we tend to put on different "issues". Ecology is a political, social, and economic concern. It is about where we work, where we live, and where we play. It is about all the things that South Africans have struggled for over years. A healthy environment is a fundamental aspect of restructuring this shattered country, and municipal workers are truly on the front-line of this environmental rebuilding. *R*

The local government transition

*what role
for trade
unions?*



Now trade unions are confronted with the transition to local government democracy. The question is, to what extent and in what form should they become involved? SAMWU national education officer JOHN MAWBY raises the questions.

This article aims to address some strategic concerns in the local government transition as a basis for further debate within trade unions. We need to devise an approach to prevent the local government transition from undermining the union movement through an exodus of leadership.

At the same time we need to ensure working class empowerment in local government. I believe that engagement with the transition is essential to the retention and strengthening of COSATU's "social movement union" traditions as opposed to those strands in its "political union" traditions which underlie the exodus at other levels. Our engagement must focus on the need to build the organs of civil society and not only on electoral politics, drawing up candidate lists and campaigning for the ANC.

Examining civil society

The question is, to what extent should COSATU take on the role of promoting the ANC election campaign – and give up leadership to sit on councils – and to what extent our effort should be directed to maintaining and strengthening "civics" and/or "civil society" during and after local government elections?

In dealing with the latter question, some comment on the SA National Civics Organisation (SANCO) is necessary. Historically, through overlapping leadership, SANCO has been closely identified with COSATU and many shopstewards are members or leaders of local SANCO civics.

Two immediate policy questions need to be explored. Is COSATU's policy to promote the "SANCO project"? If so,

what is the nature of this project?

SANCO was set up in the wake of the demise of the UDF. It grew out of the perceived need at the time to co-ordinate the "civics" movement, which had been at the base of much UDF activity (the "liberation movement" and "political party" aspects of the UDF's activities were to revert to the ANC and SACP). As SANCO has emerged, there has been an ongoing tension over the nature of its structure. Is it akin to a "trade union federation" of civics, drawing on the strongly unitary structure of COSATU as the model? Or are civics by their nature grounded in particularities of local struggles? And does the attempt to impose a strongly unitary structure determining unitary national policies merely undermine the vibrancy of local initiatives?

Is the model of a "civic" which represents a broader community a non-starter because it is actually composed of different communities with often very contradictory needs? According to one analysis, the form of development of "civics" during the 1980s can be attributed to the lack of democratic local government, so that civics are in effect "local governments in waiting"? If so, then democratisation of local government will dissolve the glue which has kept them together. A variety of bodies will emerge representing single interest issues of particular fractions of the community, be they rate-paying property owners, tenants, squatters or local organisations with a base in a particular development project.

If COSATU does engage, does it do so with a conception that it is obligated to SANCO in particular? Or does it intervene to help build a coalition of all interest groups and progressive community-based organisations (CBOs) aimed at empowering civil society in all its forms? There is every need for a project that attempts to bring together different interest groups within broader communities. There is a need to establish

co-ordination and mutual support between different fractions of the community and other more "single interest" formations concerned with the environment, sports and recreation, women or youth. The question is: will this best be achieved through backing SANCO's development or through establishing looser "Civic Forums" as a form of coalition which reinforces the "watch dog" capacities of civil society, and includes COSATU as one such organ?

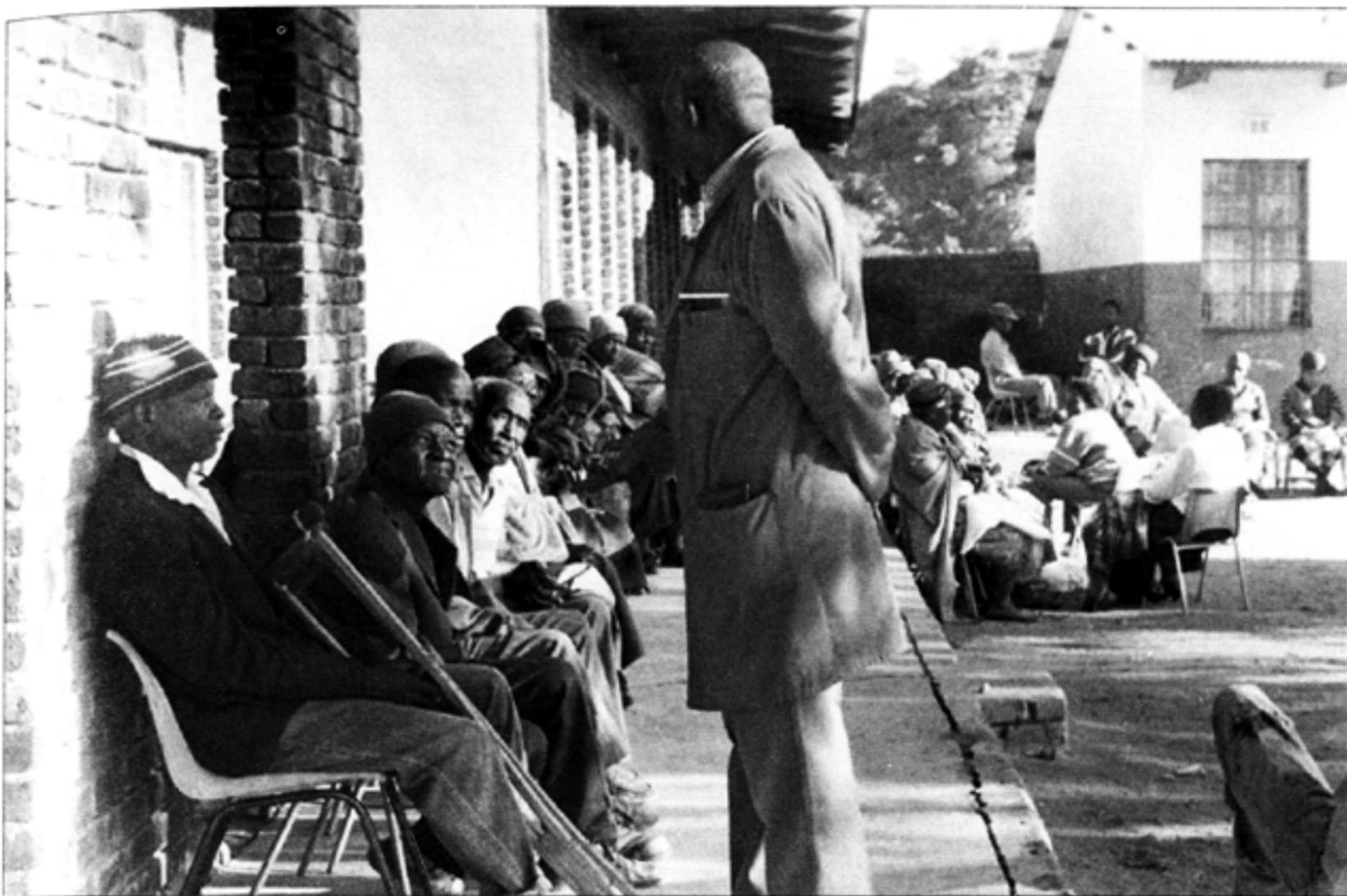
It is critical that these questions be addressed. SANCO has been grappling with these matters but there is a need for much more rigorous interaction and analysis between COSATU and SANCO (as the two most prominent existing organs of civil society) on the nature of the project needed for the empowerment of civil society.

What of the alliance?

As part of the alliance, any electoral effort will be through the ANC. Clearly any process between COSATU and SANCO does not replace co-ordination within the alliance on the electoral challenge. SANCO is not a formal party to the alliance.

It is not compulsory that local government elections are fought on a party political basis. The ward level, in particular, can be contested by independents or persons supported by non-party political formations. Political party contestation in the proportional representation side of the electoral system also allows bodies other than political parties to field candidates. This raises the possibility of some civics contesting the elections. At the same time, most candidates are likely to be party political, questions of possible united front approaches with other parties (eg, PAC and AZAPO) will need to be addressed by the alliance.

The central challenge is in every community, down to a very local level. How can an effective electoral alliance be



COSATU committed resources and candidates to the national elections: can it do so again?

forged?

The reality in vast parts of the country is that neither ANC branches nor civic structures have solid organisational structures rooted in a mass base. The debate about the roles of ANC branches and SANCO civics remain unresolved and the conflict between leadership groupings resounds. The civic has often become the base for leadership who missed out in the ANC branch. There is also extensive overlapping leadership. This means that, even where there is awareness within the civic on the need to strengthen the “watch dog” role, there is the contrary pressure to go into councils on behalf of the ANC.

COSATU could play an important role in mediating or resolving these leadership contestations. It could assert the need for serious efforts to build a stronger, more organised base and to maintain and strengthen existing organs of civil society.

There also needs to be a serious effort to examine what other organisations within civil society exist within a

community.

These may be women’s or youth groups, or organisations or people involved in single issue concerns ranging from self-help projects or primary health care to sports and environmental groups. Local government interfaces very directly with the concerns of all of these groupings. The community leadership which might win an election may not necessarily be activists in positions of political or community leadership, but rather persons engaged in practical community projects who have avoided high profile leadership contests.

In any such endeavour, we need to avoid any “COSATU arrogance” or becoming another factional force. Equally, however, the other parties need to get off their high horses and together seek to deepen the mass-based participation which backs up any choice of councillors.

The role of locals

The key structures which need to function

for COSATU to play a role are the locals backed by provincial co-ordination.

In the debate about the strengthening of locals, a central question must be on their role in building solidarity with the community and not only questions of industrial area-based solidarity.

Historically, some of the most prominent COSATU local struggles hinged on mobilising community support for consumer boycotts to support striking workers or on providing industrial worker support for demands arising in workers' communities. It is this tradition of locals which needs to be revived in building civil society.

In this regard in the Western Cape metropolitan area (not for the first time) a debate has arisen about the nature of locals as industrial or community-linked structures. This need not be an either /or debate. Making linkages into communities needs flexibility. Where people work and where they live – and should be involved in their community – are generally two different things.

In smaller towns in the country districts, the same local can generally deal with industrial and community issues. It is in the major urban areas that considerable divergence can occur.

For example, to be effective in local government issues in the Cape Metropolitan areas, "Community Locals" should draw together shopstewards who live in a particular community. The choices regarding internal boundaries within the metropolitan areas, on wards within these sub-councils, and on who from the community should be put forward as councillors must be determined at this level.

Should unions put forward shopstewards as councillors?

This question is naturally top of the agenda, especially given that the Special Congress resolved that we should do so.

It should be noted that, in most towns and smaller cities, the role of councillors is

part-time. Meetings generally take place after hours and the existing and traditional system does not treat councillors as full-time paid representatives, as is the case with provincial legislatures and parliament. In major cities and metropolitan councils, at least some councillors – currently those serving on Executive Committees – do need to apply themselves full time to their duties. In a general sense, the larger the local authority the greater the time councillors need to devote to their work.

This status of councillor needs to be addressed. In the larger authorities, it could be outmoded to consider such political representatives as merely part-time. However, the status quo is that councillors are not fully remunerated and have to remain employed. It could be possible to remain a shopsteward while being a councillor. In any event, we need to ask ourselves how the working class in a more general sense is empowered for participation. We could argue that low level allowances for councillors are retained and reinforced to prevent councillor status being a matter of income. There is virtue in having working class councillors who have to remain on the shopfloor and within the working class. The real question is to ensure that management is obliged to allow time off for them to perform council duties.

In deciding whether to participate in the "lists", it should be taken into account that many shopstewards and union officials are active leaders in their civic, ANC or SACP branch, and may willingly or unwillingly come under pressure to stand as councillors. COSATU affiliates need to ask themselves whether their lack of attention to local government dynamics may not be more damaging than informed choices and strategic debates within their ranks about the issues and terms of engagement. Where union leadership is involved, the extent to which they are mandated representatives of COSATU must be clear. There is a danger that "COSATU" can be used as a hat of convenience by persons with councillor ambitions. 

Trade unions in Nigeria

the temperature is rising



Pro-democracy demonstration on the streets of Lagos, Nigeria's capital city

JANE BARRETT spent two weeks in Nigeria in March this year. During her visit she spoke to many trade union leaders and rank and file activists. In this article she describes the role of the trade union movement in the struggle for democracy.



Nigeria won independence from British rule in 1960. Since then, it has known only two brief periods of civilian rule – between 1960 and 1966 and then again between 1979 and 1983. On 12 June 1993, the population went to the polls to elect a president for the first time in 11 years. The military regime had determined the two candidates and their manifestos. Despite this, voters, supported by the trade union movement and other democratic forces, enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to vote. The winner was Chief Moshood Abiola, representing the Social Democratic Party.

Abiola was a popular figure. As a working class boy, he spent his childhood chopping and selling firewood. He educated himself and eventually became the first African head of the giant telecommunications multi-national, ITT, in Africa. Later he became a millionaire through a string of media houses and many other concerns. He is widely known in Nigeria as a philanthropic capitalist.

However, the military regime did not announce the election results. Their excuse was that Abiola's installation as president, would unleash a civil war between the predominantly Muslim North, and the mainly Christian South. Abiola is a Southern, Yoruba-speaking Muslim.

Most commentators agree that this was a lame excuse. The military feared the election of a popular president with a legitimate mandate, who had committed himself to tackling corruption. Abiola had announced that those who had plundered the national purse would be made to repay the State.

Contrary to the claims of the military, Abiola commanded enough support across the 30-state Nigerian federation to be a unifying rather than a divisive figure.

The Campaign for Democracy

The annulment of the elections resulted in a week-long strike, led by the Campaign for Democracy, a united front body of many human rights and activist organisations, and crucially supported by a range of trade unions. Instead of installing Abiola, the regime side-stepped the issue. Head of state General Ibrahim Babangida was replaced by a so-called Interim Government led by Shonekan, a senior civil servant. Shonekan was given the brief to restore order and re-open the democratisation process. He was clearly not acting independently, but was following the orders of General Sani Abacha, Babangida's right-hand man and strategist.

During this period, there were many strikes and democratic rallies demanding that the election result be announced, and that the military and their puppet regime stand down. Matters came to a head when the Shonekan government tried to remove a range of subsidies which helped protect the living standards of working people from the ravages of inflation. Shonekan, under orders from the new military leaders, decided to take on the trade unions. He announced that, as part of the IMF structural adjustment package, subsidies would be removed and fuel increases implemented immediately. To make things worse, the regime engineered a fuel shortage, forcing massive fuel price increases. This had a tremendous knock-on effect, and prices of basic food stuffs and other goods soared.

General strike

This move angered the trade union movement. An immediate general strike was declared and, for five days, the whole economy began to grind to a halt. The strike gathered momentum and soon won the support of students, market traders, the unemployed and all those who wanted a return to civilian rule.

On the sixth day of action, Shonekan was



Derseted streets in Lagos during a general strike called by the NLC against the military regime

dismissed by General Abacha, and a new set of generals promised to start a process of moving towards democracy – which most Nigerians argue is simply a delaying tactic. The generals also promised to negotiate a Relief Package with the trade union movement to include protection for the very low paid, an end to corruption, and full and proper consultation with the trade union movement on the economy. This marked an important advance for the trade union movement, and they have since been formulating a programme of economic measures which will benefit the working class. Calls for the immediate installation of Abiola as president have continued.

A temporary truce

While the general strike was spurred by the regime's annulment of the June presidential election, the demands and subsequent negotiations went much further. A return to work truce was reached on 14 December last year after the regime agreed to principles in the Relief Package. These included the

abolition of school fees for the first twelve years of education; the introduction of a comprehensive national health scheme; the provision of houses for low income earners, and more commuter buses.

As an interim measure, it was agreed that workers in each sector should negotiate a set of allowances to alleviate the growing cost of transport, housing, health and education. The regime also agreed to scrap elements of its Structural Adjustment Programme, and to hold a national summit to find an alternative solution to Nigeria's economic problems. Immediately following the strike, negotiations for allowances in the private sector proceeded fairly well, but came unstuck in the public sector due to the government's failure to budget for the recommended allowances.

The textile union believes that the events of 12 June and the subsequent General Strike have helped convince more and more workers of the relationship between the struggle for workers' rights and the struggle for democracy. However, union officials point out that the labour movement faces some

severe limitations – including its limited access to the mass media. Despite the fact that Nigeria has many daily newspapers – including those with a fighting tradition – workers find it difficult to get a real voice through the commercial press.

“The message about the link between democracy and wages is therefore not that easy to spread. We also have work to do in breaking down certain ethnic perceptions, otherwise we may continue to get varied responses to calls for action as in the case of the national strike, when the south came out much stronger than the north.” But the textile union officials are convinced that the Nigerian trade union movement “will never again be just a bread and butter movement”.

Debating strategy and economics

But the labour movement has yet to agree on the correct strategy to oppose the continued presence of a military government. Some argue that the union movement should submerge itself in support of the Social Democratic Party of Abiola. Others argue for complete distance from all political parties, and yet others push for the establishment of a labour party which articulates the voice of workers.

The textile union argues strongly that the starting point is to build the trade union movement’s credibility by consolidating structures and servicing members. Adams Oshiomhole has argued repeatedly for unions to be seen as standard bearers, particularly in behaving in a democratic manner, with transparency and accountability. He argues that unions have a responsibility to show all Nigerians that it is possible to promote a culture of democracy, and to lead by example. “How can we tell the regime to behave democratically if we ourselves do not have our own houses in democratic good order,” says Adams Oshimhole, the union’s general secretary and vice president of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC).

Meanwhile, debate continues within the trade union movement about an economic vision for Nigeria. At an NLC seminar on “Labour and the Crisis of Economic Adjustment” in February 1994, the labour

movement started to put together the building blocks for an alternative economic policy. The seminar reiterated the NLC’s long-standing position – that a prerequisite to economic reconstruction was democratic government. Only a democratic government could be expected to manage the economy properly. This would have to include a ban on imports of luxury goods, stopping all smuggling, and a review of fiscal and monetary policies. The value of *naira* [the Nigerian currency] would have to be strengthened, the growth of small industries encouraged and the minimum pension lifted to the level of the minimum wage. Worker participation in decision making was seen as a key to economic recovery.

The seminar also emphasised the need for unions to encourage skills training and retraining as well as the need to expand basic trade union education by establishing a functioning education department in each union. The conclusions of the workshop, whilst somewhat disparate and general, could mark the beginning of a process not unlike COSATU’s development of an economic policy and contributions to the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Division between military and people

With its population of 110 million, over thirty languages, two almost equally dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) and a federal constitution uniting 30 states, many superficial observers argue that Nigeria is politically fragile. It is fragile, but not along the tribal or religious lines that some like to suggest. As Adams Oshiomhole puts it, “the biggest division in this society is between those with uniforms and those without. After all,” he says, “the bosses always remain united – whenever did you hear of them dividing on tribal or religious lines? So, when we hear people say that Nigeria is about to break up on those lines, we know it is because they have an interest in seeing the so-called stability of the corrupt military regime maintained.”

The “uniform divide” is reflected in the

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Trade union rights

Like in South Africa under apartheid, aspects of Nigeria's labour legislation are surprisingly "progressive". As in South Africa, this is largely due to the strength of the union movement and its fierce defence of trade union rights. In 1978, the regime intervened to force unions to merge into industrial unions affiliated to one of the two national centres. The state's idea was to create a union movement beholden to the regime out of the disparate union movement which was grouped into a range of national centres. But the union movement used the merger process to its own advantage.

Prior to 1978, the unions fought bitter recognition battles. However, the Trade Union Amendment Decree of 1978 changed much of that. Among other things, the Decree provided for the automatic deduction of union subscriptions. Once the majority of workers in a workplace were organised, deductions would be made for all employees, excluding managerial staff.

However, as in many countries which outlaw discrimination based on union membership, in practice it still exists. Some Nigerian employers still dismiss union leaders and pressurise applicant employees to pledge that they will not join a union if given the job. The extent to which Nigerian employers stick to the law depends in large measure on the strength of workplace organisation.

The labour relations legislative framework is built along the lines of a compulsory arbitration system. Disputes of right are referred to an industrial court (equivalent in status to the Supreme Court). Disputes of interest are referred to mediation, with the mediator generally appointed by the Minister for Labour (although in theory it is a joint appointment). If mediation fails, the dispute is referred to a tripartite panel of three arbitrators, with government chairing.

Nigerian unionists regard the industrial court with some contempt. This is because, like its British counterpart, it works on the philosophy that conditions can't be imposed on the master/servant relationship, and therefore declines to award reinstatement in

the case of unfair dismissals. The tripartite arbitration panel in the case of disputes of interest is seen as judging disputes fairly. However, the procedure is rarely used.

For, despite the fact that the labour legislation makes no provision for strikes (except in the case of an employer defying an arbitration award), strikes are the most common form of dispute resolution. The textile union for example, handles at least two strikes a week.

Not only are strikes not formally built into the industrial relations system, but the Dispute Act of 1976 states that a worker should not be paid for any period of striking, and his/her contract should be deemed broken. Despite these provisions, most workers get paid for the full duration of a strike (including in the public sector), as part of the back-to-work agreement. Workers regard this as a precondition for any return to work and anything less as totally unacceptable.

None of the unions has strike funds to see workers through before the return to work and backpay, but as Oshiomhole and his comrades in the NUTGTWN point out, "every Nigerian person is part of a family and workers can sustain strikes only because of the support they get from their immediate family and the family of workers in general". Textile workers have sustained strikes of seven weeks and more, whilst teachers in some states were on strike for four months during 1994. In 1993, almost every major sector, including doctors, went on strike.

Only once has the regime tried to charge workers for breaking the law by striking. In 1989, after a strike in the energy sector, a number of workers received ten-year sentences for striking and strike-related activities. However, they were released in 1992 after mass pressure on the regime. Detention without trial has rarely been used against unionists, although it has been used against political activists.

"The military are simply too aware of how workers would respond," say the textile union officials. And the regime has never been bold enough to carry out repeated threats of "deregulating" trade unions. ☆

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special schools and hospitals reserved for military personnel, the car perks, and the massive early retirement benefits (many bankers in Nigeria are retired army officers who have gone into banking on the basis of their retirement packages).

Over the years, just as there is an established relationship between the military and banking, the military has become integral to almost every part of the Nigerian economy – even those parts of the economy engaged in illegal activities. The US State Department, for example, now regards Nigeria as the most important staging post for the transportation of hard drugs to Europe. Given that airfields and storage facilities are under military command, it would be impossible for this deadly trade to go ahead without the involvement of very senior officers.

The same is true of Nigeria's largest export earner, its considerable oil reserves. Millions of barrels of oil have in the past been spirited away and sold on the world market without any returns being filed with the Ministry of Finance. Along with the drugs trade, this accounts for billions of dollars being stolen from a nation in which millions of people are struggling to stay alive.

For many years, the Nigerian trade union movement has been the only mass democratic organisation able to sustain continued opposition to military rule. Various democratic fronts of organisations have participated in ongoing resistance, but the union movement has been centre stage in the unfolding struggle for democracy. Its unique ability to unite workers regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds, and to provide a national organisational framework for protest, has earned it the grudging respect of all Nigeria's political players.

The trade union movement comprises two national centres – one for 'junior' workers and one for 'senior' workers (a state-imposed categorisation). The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) represents over four million so-called junior workers in 41 affiliates, and the Senior Staff Consultative Association of Nigeria (SESCAN) represents approximately

three million workers. The two national centres enjoy a close working relationship.

The temperature is rising

In the past month, there have been renewed calls for the installation of Abiola as president. As I write, Abiola himself is in detention after proclaiming himself President on the anniversary of the annulled election. Many other leading civil rights activists have been detained, and charges are pending which could result in hefty prison sentences.

The Abacha regime is clinging to its strategy of a Constitutional Conference made up of representatives largely selected by the regime itself, where only one third have been elected in ill-prepared local elections held recently. The Conference is due to last for four months, and though the regime has said it will take seriously the eventual conclusions of the Conference, it has given no guarantees.

Several important unions, notably those in the petroleum sector, have given notice of a strike to restore democracy. The temperature in Nigeria is rising. Increasing numbers of ordinary people have realised that military regimes do not abandon power voluntarily – that they sometimes need more than a little push.

Solidarity

The Nigerian trade movement, with a culture and tradition of militant action not unlike that of COSATU, faces the difficult task of developing a coherent response to the absence of democratic government, and an economy which has been pillaged and mismanaged. One thing is certain – of all the institutions which are perhaps capable of developing such a response, only the Labour Congress has the power and resolve to ensure that it is implemented in favour of the working class.

If there ever was a case for cementing solidarity links, the experiences of South African and Nigerian workers confirm its necessity. As Oshiomhole says, "Sharing our rich experiences, and learning from both our successes and failures can only help to ensure that we are more prepared for the stormy days that lie ahead". ☆

□ Interview with women unionists in Nigeria



“Pulling women into the limelight”

In 1988, the Nigerian Labour Congress established a Women’s Wing, which now has active committees in most of the 30 states which make up the Federal Republic. Many of NLC’s affiliates have also recently established Women’s Wings. JANE BARRET discussed their struggle with the executive of the NLC Women’s Wing in Jos, administrative capital of Plateau State in the north.

The five members of the Jos Women's Wing interviewed by Jane Barret are:

Rita Goyit: Chairperson of the Jos Women's Wing, is a full-time radio and television broadcaster and journalist, and an executive member of Rattawu, the union for radio, television and theatre workers.

Anne Vou Zang: Treasurer of the Nurses and Midwives Union in Jos.

Josephine Esika: Secretary of the Jos Women's Wing and member of Nasu, the union for non-academic staff of universities.

Hannatu Adamu: Vice-president of the Jos Women's Wing, and chairperson of the Women's Wing in her own union, the Nurses and Midwives Union.

Charity Chagu: Treasurer of the Jos Women's Wing, and member of the National Union of Teachers.

Labour Bulletin: What are the organisational tasks facing women activists in the Nigerian unions?

Esika: Our task is to pull women into the limelight. We call meetings and find there is a poor attendance of women. Women need to be encouraged to team together to fight – sometimes those of us who are active feel like a lone voice in the wilderness.

Adamu: It's not only women – the whole middle cadre of the unions don't participate much. But especially the women. Poverty is the source of so many problems – poorly paid workers, many of whom are women, can't even afford the cost of transport to meetings. So the problem has to be put in the context of the whole orientation of the trade union movement. We have to work hard to appeal to the poorly paid workers as a whole. In the past, many poorly paid workers have only been attracted to the unions because of the temptation of corruption.

Chagu: There is also the problem of the control of all structures by men – sometimes invitations to meetings are not passed on to women members in the lower structures!

Adamu: The position of women in the home makes it hard for

“Increasingly, women are seeing divorce as the only way to achieve freedom”

women workers to participate in union structures. For example, it is still common for men to collect their wives' pay – so the women end up with no control over their finances – they don't even have the bus fare for a meeting! A woman can't even take her child to hospital without the permission of her husband. This is compounded by religious issues, especially in areas like Kano, which is the heart of Islam in Nigeria. In Jos, there is a mixture of religions and women are freer. All over, there are still men who don't allow their wives to participate in the Women's Wing. But women all over are becoming very aware, and they are determined to participate. And, increasingly they are seeing divorce as the only way to achieve freedom. Increasing numbers of women are choosing divorce.

Labour Bulletin: As a matter of interest – what is your marital status? From my own experience in South Africa, most of the active women in the unions are not married.

Chagu: Of the five of us, I am the only one married. Hannatu is widowed, Rita and Anne are single, and Josephine is single. My husband is supportive of my involvement – I'm lucky we have an understanding. So, it seems it might be similar to South Africa!

Goyit: As a single woman, the fact of working gives you some protection against social pressures, but you still get criticised from all sides. You are expected to live with your parents, no matter what your age. I am 29 and I have finally moved to my own small place – just a room, but it's my own.

Labour Bulletin: What are the origins of the Women's Wing, and what progress has been made in establishing it nationally?

Goyit: Women workers in Lagos formed their own Women's Committee ten years ago. But their status was not official. It is now official NLC policy to set up constitutional Women's Wings in every state, but so far this is the case only in five regions. The problem is some confusion. There is not yet a national committee, so women in

the different regions have to struggle on their own. In frustration, we organised our own national meeting in 1993. Although the last NLC Conference, in 1992, approved the setting up of a national committee, the constitution of that committee has not yet been decided by the national executive.

Firstly, we need to establish a functioning national Women's Wing, including the appointment of a full-time head. Then we also need workshops at a state level to ensure the functioning of the state Women's Wings, and to agree on a common programme.

Labour Bulletin: How would you describe the overall objectives of the Women's Wing?

Goyit: Ultimately we would wish to see women integrated into the mainstream of the NLC. We would not like to be seen to be running a separate movement. But the reality at the moment is that women are not delegated any responsibility within the organisation and, in reality, "equal opportunities", even within the organisation, do not exist. The same is true in the political process. Women are the majority of voters in the country, yet their husbands tell them who to vote for! So we also have a role to play in developing the political consciousness of women.

Labour Bulletin: What are some of the concrete issues you have been taking up?

Vou Zang: We have for years been tackling

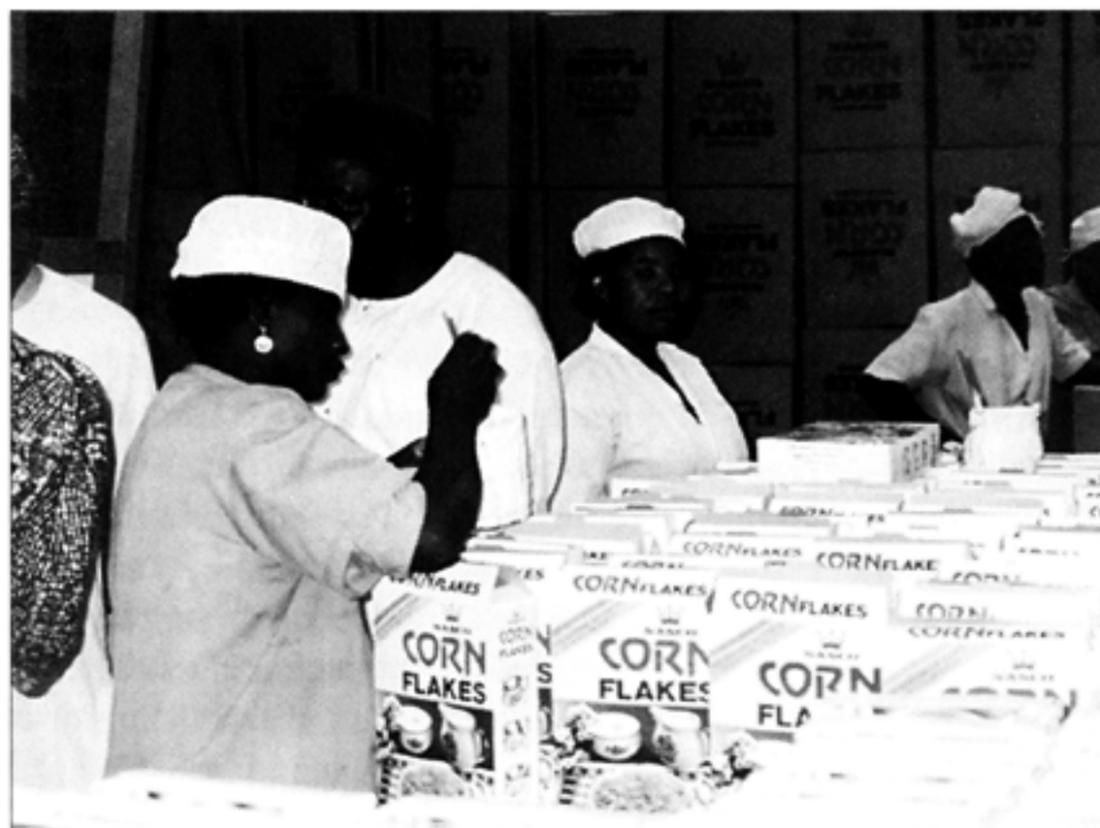
the issue of maternity rights. Despite the apparent rights of nursing mothers – four months guaranteed paid maternity leave in some states – many women are discriminated against. Unmarried mothers are not paid while on maternity leave. Even within the NLC, there has been resistance to fighting for the rights of unmarried mothers – they use the "moral decadence" argument! Some women get around it by changing their name to their grandfather's name. But why should a right be dependent on such a procedure of denying who you are?

Goyit: Then there is the whole area of reproductive health. This is an issue already taken up by WIN. WIN stands for Women in Nigeria and is a national organisation of which I am an active member. The biggest health problem for women in the rural north is what we call VVF – infections which result from very bad tearing in childbirth. It is common there because so many women are forced to marry very young, and they have children in their early teens, when they are not fully developed. A woman who is 15 and unmarried is regarded as a disgrace and is hidden indoors. So we have to tackle both the health problem and the related social problems.

Childcare is also a concrete issue to be tackled. There are very few nursery schools or day care centres. Most working mothers employ nannies known as "housegirls", who are treated almost as slaves – low pay, no

offs, expected to do all household chores. At the moment, it is simply a dream for these women to be organised – but it is a must if sisterhood and comradeship is to become a reality.

Labour Bulletin: We have a similar problem in South Africa, with most domestic workers not yet unionised. So it seems we have a lot in common as a basis for an ongoing sisterhood between the women of the NLC and the women of COSATU! ☆



Recent developments in labour law



Paul Benjamin

New labour relations law

1995 will be the year in which South Africa finally has a new labour relations law to replace the Labour Relations Act 28 of 1956 (the LRA). In August this year the new Minister of Labour, Mr Tito Mboweni, announced the appointment of a drafting committee to prepare a draft Act for submission to the National Manpower Commission. The committee has been given a period of six weeks to prepare the new law with the assistance of international experts. From October onwards, the committee's proposals will be debated in the NMC, the Parliamentary committees and the Houses of Parliament.

The law that is produced by this process will probably be the basis of our labour laws for many years to come. Trade unions will therefore have to prepare their positions for

the debates in the rest of this year and next year. If they lose this opportunity, they may pay the price for many years to come.

One of the key issues for the drafting committee is the need to harmonise our labour relations laws. The intense legislative activity during the last year of apartheid government has left us with four labour relations laws (the LRA, the Agricultural LRA and the laws for the public sector and teachers) as well as labour regulations for the Police Force, not to mention the further confusion of homeland labour law. The committee will make proposals for a single LRA for all sectors of the economy - a demand that COSATU has made for many years. The enactment of such a law will require the support of not only the Minister of Labour, but also the Ministers responsible for the public service and public education.

During the 1980's the LRA was amended virtually every year. The result of all these changes is that the Act is technical, complicated and confusing. It is unions and workers who have suffered because of these technicalities. Many cases in the Industrial Court have been lost because of technical objections. Most importantly, the provisions concerning ballots (which have been criticised by the Internal Labour Organisation) have been used by employers to stop strikes, the best known case being the national metal strike of 1992.

The appointment of the drafting committee has been extremely controversial and received considerable press coverage. The reason for this was the view held by some people that the appointment of such a committee undermines tri-partism. They felt that the Act should rather be drafted through the National Manpower Commission. But the NMC has not been a success in drafting legislation. It has appointed committees to produce a new and consolidated LRA since the end of the 1980's but this has not led to new laws. The process set up by the Minister will allow the NMC to debate the draft prepared by the appointed committee, which will make for quicker process.

The 1994 International Labour Conference

One result of South Africa's return to the international community was the participation by a tri-partite delegation in the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June this year. The Conference marked the 75th anniversary of the ILO. South Africa's achievement of democracy was one of the dominant themes of the Conference. The government's acceptance of international standards and the significant tri-partite developments in the country were seen by many speakers at the conference as a major vindication of the values of the ILO. Minister Mboweni addressed a plenary session of the Conference. He committed the South African Government to the full implementation of the ILO Fact Finding and Conciliation Commission Report of 1992. He also

expressed his support for the central ILO standards and said that he would recommend South Africa's adoption of the most important conventions on collective bargaining and freedom of association. The Minister expressed the view that development should not occur at the expense of human dignity and minimum standards. This was seen as an important indication of South Africa's support for the enforcement of minimum social standards through trade - one of the most important debates in the international community at the moment with the establishment of the new World Trade Organisation.

The Conference saw the end of the Declaration Against Apartheid. The resolution dissolving the Committee on Action Against Apartheid establishes a technical assistance programme to assist in the construction and development of a democratic South Africa. This programme will cover areas including technical assistance for labour legislation reform, human resources development and management, affirmative action, occupational health and safety and capacity building for the trade unions.

The Conference adopted a convention and recommendation on part-time work. The central theme of the convention is that all employment and social security benefits should be available for part-time employees on a proportional basis. The convention will certainly focus attention on the approach in South African law to part-time workers; for instance, workers employed on three or less days a week for an employer are not entitled in terms of the basic Conditions of Employment Act to annual leave or paid sick leave.

Representatives of the National Union of Mineworkers, the Chamber of Mines and the Government Mining Engineer all took part in debates over the development of a convention on mine safety and health. This process will continue in 1995 and should then lead to the adoption of a convention in this important area.

Shortly after the end of the Conference a



Commission of Inquiry into Safety and Health in Mines in South Africa began to sit. The Commission consists of a judge and three expert commissioners (two from overseas). Extensive reliance has been placed in the Commission on international standards and the three major parties have all accepted that South African law must be changed to bring it into line with appropriate international standards.

A victory in the Appeal Court

In March the trade unions won one of their most important victories in the labour courts. This came in the case of *NUMSA v Borg-Warner* – a case involving a company's refusal to comply with an agreement to re-hire retrenched workers. The Supreme Court in the Eastern Cape had held that a "selective re-employment" could never be an unfair labour practice as the dismissed workers were no longer employees for the purposes of the LRA and therefore could not bring a case to court. This approach gives employers the leeway to deal with strikes by a dismissal

followed by a selective re-employment; it created what one writer has described as a "secret weapon against strikes".

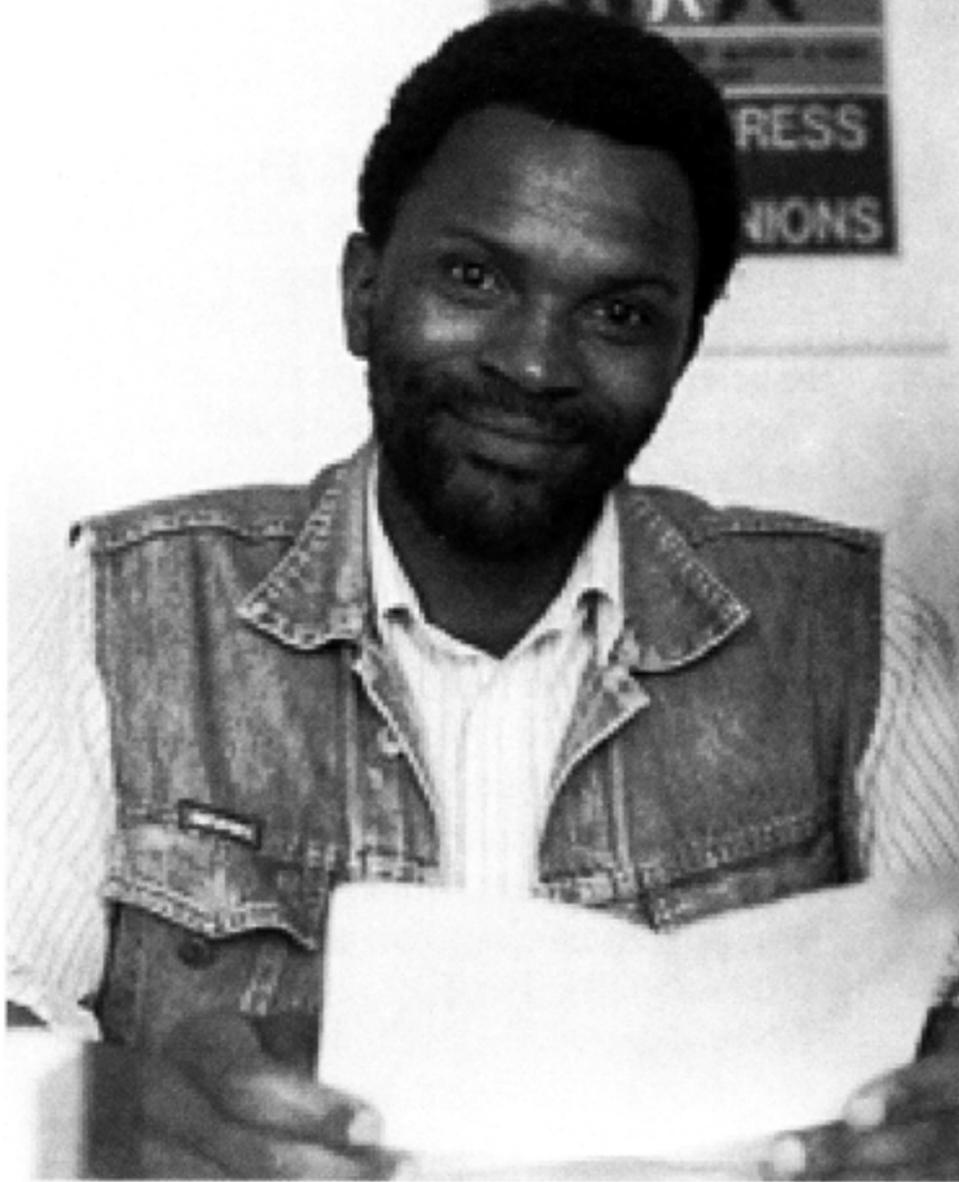
The secret weapon has now been destroyed. The highest court in the land (the Appellate Division, Bloemfontein) has accepted that a refusal to re-employ dismissed workers can be an unfair labour practice. This will restrict the employers power in two situations: where an employer dismisses strikers and then wishes to re-employ some of them selectively and where an employer has undertaken (as in the *Borg-Warner* case) to re-employ retrenched workers and fails to do so.

The case also reveals one other feature of our labour law. The retrenchment agreement in issue was signed in 1986 and the employer's refusal to comply with it happened in 1988. It took another six years for the case to be resolved.

Hopefully, the new law will make delays of this type something of the past. ☆

NEHAWU's Vusi Nhlapo:

*President who
dreams of
studying law*



Being a full-time president of the union, I spend a lot of time travelling on union business. Although I drive a Corolla, I love fast cars. It does not have to be expensive, but a modest one that can take me from one place to another at a reasonable time. My work schedule is very tight, I did not even have time to watch the World Cup. I was only able to watch the opening match and the final. Although I am out of touch with the local soccer scene, I have always been a fan of Orlando Pirates despite all its problems. After all, this is my home town team. Ruud Gullit of Holland is my favourite international soccer star. I would have vouched for Maradona, had he not been exposed as a drug addict.

Early life

I was born in Orlando East, on 20 September 1956. I have four brothers and three sisters. My father was a qualified plumber, and my mother a domestic worker. My father used to work for the Administration board and he used to take me with to work on school holidays. I noticed how he was being exploited. His white supervisors used to make him do odd jobs at their houses.

We used to stay in a two-roomed house with a bedroom and a kitchen. The kitchen was a bit bigger and we divided it into two, with the other part serving as a sitting room. All the children slept in this sitting room. But it was not only us children who slept in the sitting room. There were aunts and

cousins who came to stay from time to time. They would say they were coming to stay for a week, but this became extended stays and they would stay a month, two months or even longer.

Schooling history

I attended school at Emthonjeni primary in Orlando, and then proceeded to Orlando North secondary. Orlando North was sponsored by Anglo-American as part of the company's social responsibility programme. But the school became highly politicised as it had teachers like Aubrey Mokoena, who were activists.

I then proceeded to Madibane High, which was very isolated from other schools at the time and the teachers exercised strict discipline on students. Although I was not involved in student politics, I was however, politically aware. My father had recently passed away, and as the eldest son, my mother looked up to me to provide for the family. I therefore wanted to complete my schooling and proceed to find work to support my family. I told myself that getting involved in student activities would land me in jail. This put me on bad terms with some of my peers, because they wanted me to get involved in student politics.

I remember on 15 June 1976 when we were forced to join a protest march. I had left home as usual to go to school, and was wearing my school uniform and carrying books. Many of us did not know that there was a march planned. We did not go to assembly that morning, and there was a lot of tension in the air. When we arrived at school, we were told that there would be a march. It felt like one was in a different world. Other students were already demonstrating in the school premises and we had to join in the march.

Work history

My first job was as a clerk and insurance salesman at Metropolitan Homes Trust Life in 1977. I worked there until 1980 when I was retrenched. I then joined Checkers as a stock counting clerk. This was a new department and we were paid more than all

the other workers who had been there longer than us. I worked there for one year and was retrenched again when the department was closed. I was unemployed for nearly three years, doing odd jobs here and there.

In 1984 I was employed at Wits University laboratory in the zoology department. When I filled in employment forms, there was another form of the Black University Workers Association. As a desperate job seeker, I filled that one in too, and was informed that R1 would be deducted from my wages for the association. In a way, it was some kind of condition of employment to belong to BUWA. Almost all black workers at the university were also members of the association.

After working for some time at the laboratory, my title was changed to that of laboratory technician. I did not have any formal training for this, it was mostly an on-the-job training. Anyway, the university is very exploitative of its workforce, in a sense that when they realise that you have gained experience in some form of work, they will change your title and give you more responsibilities. But they never improve your salary alongside the extra responsibilities you are given.

Joining the union

In 1986, some workers started organising for the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) at work. Although most of us were members of BUWA, including those who were organising for GAWU, we signed up for GAWU. Our aim in joining GAWU was to cripple and eventually kill the association. Although most of us resigned from BUWA after joining GAWU, our aim of killing the staff association did not succeed. This is because other workers still remained members of BUWA and refused to join GAWU.

There was a vote conducted among university workers to determine which organisation should represent them. GAWU won the majority of votes, and the university started negotiations with it for a recognition agreement. Most of us then started resigning from the association after GAWU won the

vote. After a while, I was elected a shopsteward for GAWU. This was the start of my active involvement in trade unionism.

In 1987, GAWU merged with two other unions to form NEHAWU, in keeping with COSATU's principle of one union in one industry. Before the merger, we had problems with people who still held dual membership of GAWU and the staff association.

Leading NEHAWU

In 1992, I was elected first vice president of NEHAWU. At that time, the union was very disorganised and had a lot of problems. There was basically no co-ordination or team work amongst the office bearers, and morale among staff members was very low.

When the 1992 strikes happened, we took a decision that national office bearers need to co-ordinate these at head office level.

As we had no resources in the regions, and the president and second vice president at the time were based outside of the PWV area, I started working full-time in the union, with the major responsibility of leading negotiations in the strike and putting coherence into the office bearers strategy.

Things in the union started changing in 1993. A new team of office bearers took over when I was elected president. We started reorganising the union, by instilling a new culture of co-operation. The office bearers started working together as a team. We embarked on branch visits to give our members a sense of belonging in their union.

The strikes that happened in the health sector, for example, gave NEHAWU a high profile. Unorganised workers within the sector started joining the union in greater numbers. This also increased COSATU's profile within the public sector through our union.

NUM the inspiration

NUM has always been a source of inspiration. Through the leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa, they took on the powerful mining bosses in the mineworkers strike of 1987. NUM still evokes great pride in me about trade unionism in this country.

At the moment, I concentrate my efforts

full-time on union work. However, I am still on the university's books as an employee. When I am no longer a president of the union, I will still have a job to go back to.

My union work leaves me little spare time. I am married and have two children, aged 17 and 11 years. For example, I can no longer take my children to movies or help them with their school work. That has put me in a bad spot with them.

Regrets

I have two regrets in my life. The one is that I did not pursue my second option of becoming a lawyer, seeing that I could not become an architect. The second is that our political situation did not turn out to be a revolution we all thought it would be. This places us in a difficult position of how do we deal with our comrades who are cabinet ministers. Especially for us in the public sector, we are not sure whether these ministers are responsible to the ANC or to the government of national unity.

I still dream of studying law one day. ☆



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