

WORKERS!

This is your workers' newspaper - the first but not the last of 1974. It will appear once a month, regularly - watch out for it!

But remember it is your newspaper - make sure that it says what you want it to say, that it has articles that interest you, that it reports the news that you want to know about.

You can do this by writing articles for Abasebenzi yourself. It is not necessary to be a well educated person, not is it necessary to write in English - your own language, whether Xhosa or Sotho, is the best.

Every factory must appoint one worker to write articles for Abasebenzi. His job will be to tell the workers of Cape Town about your problems, your attempts to organize, your successes and your failures. Only in this way can all the workers learn about the problems they face, and how to beat those problems.

Share your experiences and the things you have learned with your brother workers! It is no use being wise if no one can benefit from your wisdom. Write short articles for Abasebenzi - regularly!

Also, if you have a particular problem, write to us and tell us about it. We will do our best to give you the answer - and will put it in Abasebenzi so that other workers can be enlightened too.

Remember - a lamp displays no light when it is hidden under a bucket.

Send your reports to: The Wages Commission,
 Student Union,
 University of Cape Town
 Rondebosch.

We will not print your name to protect you.

The GENERAL ELECTIONS - what do they hold in store for black workers?

White people vote in the general election on April 24th. They are voting to elect the government that will rule the lives of white people and black people. What can workers expect from this election?

Let us look at who is contesting the election. Firstly, the Nationalist Party ~~is~~ aims to protect the white worker. It has kept most skilled jobs reserved for whites, so that blacks cannot advance. It has kept wages for blacks low - while wages for whites are sky-high. High wages for white workers means a higher cost-of-living for everyone - so black workers are suffering because white workers take such high wages. The Nationalist Party also keeps the contract system - this is to have as few blacks in the cities as are needed for the factories. In other words, a big "store" of black workers has been built up in the "homelands" which is drawn on only when needed by white employers. Because there are so many workers and so few jobs, the employers can keep wages low.

The Nationalist Party is almost certain to win as many if not more seats in Parliament - it already has a majority of 71.

The United Party's policy is similar to the Nationalists. There will be relaxations on job reservations, but not on the pass laws or influx control. It is actually very hard to say exactly what the United Party would do for ~~black~~ black workers, but the main leaders and supporters of the United Party are wealthy businessmen or landowners. The leader, Sir de Villiers Graaf, himself, is a big farmer near Cape Town.

The Progressive Party would give educated or wealthy blacks the vote, and the right to go to Parliament. It would also cause black wages to go up, it would allow trade unions for blacks, it would do away with job reservation, and in time would abolish influx control and pass laws.

It is an enlightened party, but it would make no changes in how the wealth of South Africa is distributed. Its main supporters are often rich businessmen, like Mr. Harry Oppenheimer, who owns many of the mines. It offers some black people a share in the government, but it does not offer black workers a share in the wealth that those workers produce.

Written by G. Young, SRC, UCT

AFRICAN WORKERS TAKE HOLD IN NATAL

Following the concerted efforts of workers in Durban and Pietermaritzburg the African trade unions which were started there last year are continuing to expand and become firmly established. Three unions are now operating in Durban - in the Textile, Clothing and Metal and Allied industries. Meanwhile, membership of the General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund (which offers death benefits to its members) has reached 15,000. The Benefit Fund and the three unions also have branches in Pietermaritzburg.

In the short time in which these unions have been operating in Natal, their membership has increased dramatically. The membership of the Metal and Allied Union stands at over 3000, that of the Textile Workers Union at 2000 and that of the Clothing Workers Union at 1000. The unions are at present embarking on extensive training programmes to train workers in union organisation at a factory level.

This progress has been made in spite of attempts by Government and employers to halt the expansion of these unions. Employers have in many cases refused to negotiate with the unions - but as the power of the unions has increased, so more employers have been forced to recognise that their workers want to be represented by a union. At the recent strikes in the textile industry in Durban, for example, the management for the first time negotiated with union officials.

The Government has also attempted to halt the expansion of unions amongst Black workers by banning four of the white trade union organisers who had been active in establishing these unions. Following the bannings, however, hundreds of workers streamed to the trade union offices in Durban to offer their assistance and it is clear that the unions are not going to be defeated by arbitrary Government action of this sort.

ADVICE BUREAU TO OFFER BENEFITS TO MEMBERS

In an important move which will benefit thousands of workers in the Western Cape, the Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau has proposed offering death and retirement benefits to all its members. This is to form the subject of a special general meeting of members of the Bureau.

The Executive Committee of the Bureau has proposed that for a subscription of 20c/week, all its members be offered death benefits which cover the member's entire family, and retirement benefits which are paid to the member when he retires or leaves the Bureau. Under the proposed scheme, the following death benefits are offered:

On death of a member	R100
On death of his wife/her husband	R100
On death of child between 14 and 21 years old	R100
On death of child between 10 and 14 years old	R 60
On death of child between 6 and 10 years old	R 40
On death of child between 3 and 6 years old	R 30
On death of child under 3 years old	R 20
On death of parent over 65 years old	R 20

Retirement Benefits

These benefits depend on how long the person has been a member of the Fund. If a member simply leaves the Fund before reaching retirement age (sixty years for males, fifty five for females) he will receive the following amount according to his number of completed years of membership of the Fund.

No. of completed years membership	Total payment	No. of completed years membership	Total payment
1	4,70	5	25,80
10	56,20	15	91,30
20	131,10	25	175,50
30	224,70	35	278,50
40	337,00	44	387,20

Proportional payments will be made for the years between those shown on the table.

If the member leaves the Fund at retirement age then in addition to the above benefit he will receive a bonus which will be determined from time to time by the Committee of Management of the Fund (dependant on how much money is in the Fund at the time). The bonus will also be based on how long the person has been a member of the Fund.

These moves are obviously important to the thousands of workers who at present have no financial protection against death or retirement. The Executive Committee of the Bureau is confident that the benefit will be extremely popular with workers and expect a large attendance at their Meeting.

While the meeting is only for members of the Bureau, all workers over the age of 16yrs can become members of the Bureau, and can join at the Meeting where they will also be able to apply to join the benefit scheme.

STRIKES AT LEYLAND

On March 4th and 5th workers at the Mobeni (Durban) plant of Leyland went on strike. 175 out of the 220 workers, all assembly line workers, went out on strike. They were all members of Mr. Mthethwas African Metal and Allied Workers Union.

The cause of the strike was management's refusal to negotiate with the Union who represent a vast majority of the workers at the plant. The Chairman of the parent company in Britain was in South Africa during the time of the strike. The Union asked Lord Stokes, the Chairman, to come to Durban to settle the unrest. He refused to do this.

All the strikers were taken back after two days having forfeited their pay for the days on which they struck, and thus the strike ended. On Wednesday the 16th and Thursday 17th of March, 65 workers were retrenched. All these workers were assembly line workers, all had struck and 14 of the lot were members of the Works Committee which originally had six members.

The agreement that was reached that ended the strike was that Leyland recognised that its members belong to trade unions. Although management refused to negotiate with the unions directly it will negotiate with the union via any union official who is employed by Leyland. The reason given for refusing to negotiate with the union is that 'the union is unregistered - it has nothing to do with the colour of the employees'.

Does the director of planning and finance, Dr. Jacobz, (who gave these reasons) not know that the eligibility for a union to register resides in the colour factor and only the colour factor?

Mr Mthethwa said that the Union has gained a small victory by getting Leyland to agree to talk to representatives of the Union who are employed by Leyland.

Leyland insists on using the existing "legal machinery" to solve labour disputes. But it is not against the law to form an African trade union, or for this Union to negotiate with Management. When all the workers were retrenched, Dr. Jacobz, emphasized that the retrenchment had nothing to do with strikes. There might be correlations between the two events - who knows for sure besides Leyland?

The British Parliament's Committee that investigated the activities of British firms in South Africa recommended that

- 1) All workers get paid above the Poverty Datum Line,
- 2) The Firms co-operate with Black trade unions.

Leyland was listed as a particularly 'bad' employer by this Committee.

Leyland claims to have comfortably satisfied the first recommendation although not even that is 100% sure. Certainly, by the very actions and attitudes towards Black unions they do not intend satisfying the second recommendation.

We hope that Leyland will permit their employees to decide for themselves what sort of negotiating machinery they desire, and then to co-operate with their workers and their chosen representatives

TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Worker Education Programme of the Advice Bureau will start once more in the first week of May. Workers will be notified in greater detail towards the end of this month.

WAGE BOARD TO INVESTIGATE FISH PROCESSING INDUSTRY

The Minister of Labour has announced that the Wage Board is to investigate the wages and working conditions of the Fish Processing Industry. The firms in Cape Town which are involved are:

Irvin and Johnson Fisheries (Woodstock and Maitland)

Sea Harvest Co-operation.

Amalgamated Fisheries

The firms in Hout Bay which are involved are:

Snookies Smokeries

De Gama Visbedryf

Chapmans Peak Fisheries

Hout Bay Canning Company

S.A. Sea Products

Friedman and Rabinowitz.

The Wage Board is a Government appointed body which investigates all aspects of an industry and then decides what wages are to be paid and what working conditions are to be. It first calls for written evidence - in this case the written representations have to be sent to the Wage Board by March 22nd. Later it comes to Cape Town to hear verbal evidence - this date has not yet been announced.

At the Wages Board sittings, the employers are represented, as are the trade unions, (for whites and coloureds). African workers are represented by the Bantu Labour Officer (a White, appointed by the Government).

It is of course, extremely important that all workers have a say in the Wage Board negotiations. Workers should prepare their own evidence and go to the Wage Board themselves to make their demands known. But to do this, the workers must first organise themselves and go to the Wage Board with common, well motivated, demands.

The Wages Commission has submitted written evidence to the Wage Board after conducting a survey of the industry, and will also notify workers of the date and time of the Wage Board sitting so that they will be able to attend. The workers must ask for time off work to attend this sitting, or else send workers who are off to represent them. It is important to remember that no worker can be victimised for giving evidence to the Wage Board - workers must therefore be confident to speak out and make their demands clearly known.

Issued by the Wages Commission
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