

1. Workers Protest Against Wage Board Recommendations

At a meeting of unskilled workers at St. Marks Hall in Athlone during the last week in May, it was decided to object to the Wage Board about the new wage levels that had been recommended.

All the workers felt that the new minimum wages were too low and that it was impossible to properly look after their families on such low wages. The workers signed a petition addressed to the Minister of Labour which said:-

We are workers covered by the Unskilled Labour Determination. We are dissatisfied with the new wage of R14.50 per week. Our cost-of-living is very high and we are no longer able to keep a civilised standard. We object to the proposals of the Wage Board, and we ask the Minister of Labour to give us higher wages.

The meeting was addressed by Mr. Norman Daniels of the Textile Workers Industrial Union who explained what the new recommended wages meant in comparison to the old wages. He told the workers that the new wages were still too low and that TUCSA had objected to the Wage Board and asked the Board to increase the wage levels.

Mr. Gordon Young of the Wages Commission also addressed the workers and emphasised to them that the wages laid down by the Wage Board were minimum wages and that there was no law preventing employers from paying higher wages. Workers at individual factories and businesses should talk to their own employers and try to get them to increase their wages. In order to do this, workers should form works committees as this gave the workers a stronger voice and also protected them against victimisation. It was only if workers stood together in a strong and united way that their voice would be listened to.

2. Training Course for workers

There will be a training course for workers, on how to form and run works committees, next month. The course will be on the weekend of 20th, 21st and 22nd July, and it will be held at the Christian Institute (Opposite the railway station, Mowbray).

All workers are welcome, but members of works committees are especially welcome. Workers will be given lectures by experts on how to form works committees, how to negotiate with the employers, how to approach the Dept. of Labour, how to get the committee registered, how to deal with a worker's complaint, and how to represent the workers. They will also learn all about Unemployment Insurance, Workman's Compensation, and all the laws that protect workers.

If you want to attend this course, give your name in at the WP Workers Advice Bureau. Transport from the Christian Institute back to the townships will be provided, and meals.

Even if you have not given your name to the Advice Bureau, you can still attend. The course is free.

3. Western Province Workers Advice Bureau - Inaugural Meeting

Members of the Western Province Workers Advice Bureau are reminded of the first general meeting of the Bureau. It will be held on Wednesday, 20th June, at 7.00 p.m., at the Christian Institute (1 Long Street, Mowbray - opposite the railway station). All members are welcome, but if you cannot come, give your apologies to the Secretary at the office.

Workers who are not members, can come to the meeting and join there.

The meeting is to approve the constitution, and to elect an executive committee and a Board of Trustees to manage the Advice Bureau.

4. National Union of Clothing Workers (S.A.)

Although African workers are not allowed to form registered trade unions, there is nothing to stop them forming unofficial trade unions which can assist them in improving their working conditions. One such union is the National Union of Clothing Workers which is the largest African trade union in the country, with 18,000 members.

The National Union of Clothing Workers has for many years been a leader in the field of African Trade Unionism. In the past it was affiliated to TUCSA (the Trade Union Council of S.A.) but in February 1969, all African Trade Union movements were excluded from their affiliation mainly as a result of strong government pressure.

The National Union of Clothing Workers has, however, continued to be effective - the main reason for this is probably the strong support given to the African union by its registered White and Coloured counterpart, the Garment Workers Union. The African Union is recognised by employers, who deduct membership dues from wages, and the Union is allowed to organise inside the factories.

Under the leadership of Mrs. Lucy Mvubelo, the membership of the Union has grown to more than 18,000 - the National Union of Clothing Workers is living proof that Africans are capable of running the trade unions efficiently. The Union has made a special effort to educate its members about industrial legislation. It has also provided a system of group insurance for its members.

At its Annual Conference in April 1973, Mrs. Mvubelo, the General Secretary of the Union, had this to say of African trade unions:-

"Only if trade union organisations can co-operate without discriminating between members on the basis of colour of skin, can better understanding between workers and management come about. In fact there is no substitute for trade union recognition."