

When negotiating with your bosses for a higher wage, don't tell him that you don't get enough money and want a rise. Tell him that you need a wage above the "Effective Minimum Level", (R30 a week) and tell him why you need this money. Tell him how much you need for food, for housing and for all the other things that you must spend your money on. If you tell him all these things, he will find it very difficult to justify the low wages he is paying you.

5. THE STRIKE IN DURBAN

In January and February, over 50,000 Natal workers went on strike. Industry was paralysed for two weeks, police had to be flown in from Pretoria, and Parliament debated the issue. Why did this strike happen?

The best way we can find a reason for the strikes is to look at the wages that were being paid before the strike. The Frame group of companies provides a good example. At Consolidated Woolwashings, some workers were getting as little as R7.25 per week. Who can support a family on that little, but the bosses of the firm made profits of R2.5 million which is 70% more than the year before. So it is clear who is suffering so that the bosses can make more profits.

There were many other examples of low wages. The Wage Board laid down a wage for the brick making industry of R9.20. But workers at the Coronation Brick Company refused to work for this amount, so they went on strike. The Coronation Brick Company had to raise their wages to R11.04 and the workers are now back at work. It was this strike that started off the whole crisis.

Once the strike spread, some firms reacted by immediately raising wages. The Pietermaritzburg City Council brought wages up from R9 to R12, and the Durban City Council raised wages by R2 per week after 3,000 essential workers had gone on strike. White volunteers had to come in and help with things such as rubbish removal because of the strike. Some firms raised their wages without any strikes occurring. One such was Unilever, which raised wages to R8.50 per week.

Other firms were not so sympathetic. National Containers sacked over 300 workers. Motorvia paid off 200 drivers who wanted R40 per week. Many firms sacked small numbers of workers whom they called "agitators".

The main firms hit were in the Frame Group. Trade unionists accused Mr. Frame of building his empire "on the backs of cheap labour". One of his workers was paid less than R27 per month! Mr. Frame is one of the wealthiest businessmen in the country. But most of his workers earn less than R10.50, so that they don't even get Unemployment Insurance.

Over 100 firms were affected by the strike and about 50,000 workers stopped work for higher pay. It is estimated that firms will pay R5 million in wages as a result of the strike.

Many businessmen are now asking themselves why the strike occurred. Even the government is realising that workers are dissatisfied with low wages and that there will be unrest unless wages are increased. But one of the best ways of getting higher wages is by forming trade unions.

Because there was a trade union, the workers of Mr. Frame were able to stand together united, and presented one list of demands. They refused to agree to Mr. Frame's offer and went on strike until they were forced to go back to work. Other strikes collapsed because there was no trade union and no unity among the workers. So the bosses were able to offer very small increases.

A Durban City Councillor criticised some wage demands as "preposterous" and said they were an indication of the "emptiness of the African mentality". The Mayor of Durban later apologised for these remarks.

When workers presented demands to one boss after going on strike, the boss was surprised and said "Why didn't you tell me you were struggling to make ends meet?". The workers just laughed. When the boss offered them a R2 increase per week, they laughed again.

One worker said "Although the people are going back to work now, it is not because of the increase being sufficient, it is because we are hungry and need our jobs."

Workers with trade unions are better off than workers who have nobody representing them.

Many people blamed the strikes on agitators, but not one worker has been arrested and brought to court for agitating. Even the Minister of Labour said there were agitators. Some people said "A worker who is getting R8 per week doesn't need an agitator to tell him he is being exploited".

Now that the strikes are over, it is possible to see the reasons for them and the results. It is obvious that workers in Natal were very badly paid and that there were no longer any ways they could achieve increases without striking. It is now also clear that the bosses have bought off their workers by paying them very small increases. Because they needed the money, the workers have gone back to work, but their wages are still too low to live properly. It is for this reason that we can say that the strikes were not a great success for the workers, because they did not get big enough increases. Instead, their leaders were sacked, they were intimidated by the large numbers of police and they needed work, so they had to agree to the increases the bosses offered them and go back to work.

Why is this? The workers did not have the unity that is necessary for a strike. But the main reason was they did not have a trade union. If they had a union, the strike may not have been necessary, because the union would have negotiated with the bosses and made known the voice of the workers. The lesson for Cape Town workers is that a strike is the last resort. The first step is to form a workers' committee. When this is strong, turn it into a trade union. Then the trade union can talk to the bosses for you and fight the battle for higher wages in the best way.

6. WORKERS' SEMINAR

The "Wages Commission" at the University has organised a workers' seminar to be held on the 9th, 10th and 11th March. The seminar begins on the Friday night and finishes on Sunday night. At the seminar, workers will be told of the different laws, of how to form works' committees, of how to negotiate with their bosses.

We suggest that you get together with your fellow workers at your place of work and elect a representative to send to the seminar. Your representative should come to the Western Province Advice Bureau (before the 9th of March) where we will give him more details about the seminar.

7. WORKERS GET CHANCE TO GAIN HIGHER WAGES

Workers in every industry have been given the chance to get higher wages by the Minister of Labour. He has ordered the Wage Board to review the Unskilled Labour Determination. This Determination does not cover all workers, but it will be used as an example to other industries. So if wages are increased in this Determination then wages will go up for everybody.

In December 1971 the Minister announced that wages for the Unskilled Determination would be from R11. Now the Wage Board will review these wages and decide on increases. But first it will ask for evidence from interested parties.

IF YOU ARE COVERED BY THE DETERMINATION AND IF YOU WANT HIGHER WAGES THEN YOU MUST MAKE YOUR DEMANDS TO THE WAGE BOARD.

Who is covered by the Determination? Office cleaners, messengers, demolition workers, excavating or levelling workers, workers making fertilizer, grease, electricity, gas, animal food, tanning, night soil removers, scrap metal and many others.

If you do this sort of work, it is YOUR wages that the Wage Board will be reviewing. How can the Wage Board give you good wages if it does not know what you want?

The Workers' Advice Office will assist workers in making demands for higher wages for this Determination. Your factory will be visited, and information distributed. But if you want to make demands of the Wage Board, come to the Advice Bureau and we will help you.