

STRIKE AT THE OLD MUTUAL CENTRE

On January 15, 144 building workers went on strike at the Old Mutual Centre which is being built at Greyville.

PAY DISPUTE

To understand their strike, we must know how building workers receive their holiday pay. At Christmas time builders get three weeks' paid holiday. In this firm the workers who work there for more than a year can choose to get two weeks' pay at the beginning of the holiday and one week's pay when they go back to work at the end of the holiday. The other workers get their three weeks' pay at the beginning of the holiday.

When building started again in January the workers who had been paid only two weeks' pay before Christmas were given the rest of their holiday pay. The other workers were angry. They said that the building contractor had not paid them wages for the last week of work in December. They refused to work.

Police cars and dogs arrived and an official from the labour department came to tell the strikers to get back to work. The workers did not accept his explanations and they were eventually fired. The next day most of the strikers were back at work.

THE NEED TO ORGANISE

It seems that the main trouble in many disputes is that workers do not talk to one another. The story of this strike shows how important it is for workers to be informed of what the managers as well as the workers are doing. This can only be done when workers are organised. Workers cannot trust managers and government officials to represent the workers' interests.

Only when the leaders are elected by the workers and when the workers stand together can the true interests of the workers be represented.

CARTAGE MEN GO ON STRIKE

There have been two strikes in Durban this year. One was at International Delivery, a cartage company. Thirty labourers went on strike there on 14th January.

A spokesman for the strikers said: "Our wages are too low. We want overalls, gumboots, gloves and raincoats to work in. We work with heavy drums and other hardware in our own clothes and often in the rain"

They demanded a raise of R5 a week and the clothing. The strike ended later that day when they were offered R3 a week more, and a pair of overalls.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS STRIKE

We could call this a 'cost of living strike'. The increase won by the workers was just sufficient to cover the rise in the cost of living.

In spite of their militant action, the workers at I.D.C. are still underpaid. Like four out of five Black workers in S.A., they are still being paid less than R27 a week, which is what it costs for food, rent, clothing and the other basic necessities. R27 a week leaves nothing

over for living like a man, not like a machine in a factory.

The workers at I.D.C. were courageous. It is difficult for a small number of workers in a firm like this one to take effective action. But if they can join with many thousands of other workers doing a similar type of work, their position will be much stronger. They will be able to take more effective action than a 'cost of living strike'.

In the meantime we salute the I.D.C. workers for the stand they made in January.

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