

Another way in which the workers preserved their unity was by rejecting all efforts by the bosses to divide them along apartheid lines. At the Frame factories, at the Durban municipality and many other factories, the bosses pleaded with Indian and Coloured unskilled workers to keep on working. They even offered them higher wages if they did not go on strike. But the Indian and Coloured workers did not fall into this Apartheid trap! They knew that the bosses would again reduce their wages as soon as the unity of the workers had been broken. All over Durban African, Indian and Coloured workers went on strike together. Through their unity they forced the bosses to give them wage increases. The workers of Durban realised that the unity of workers did not mean that only African workers must be united. It meant that all African, Indian and Coloured workers must be united.

## PROBLEMS

Because of the unity and strength of the workers they often rejected the first wage increases offered by management. But the workers of Durban were very poor and could not strike for very long. Eventually they had to accept management's second offer, even though this might be less than they demanded.

A second problem was that although the workers in different factories all went on strike together, they all made different demands. Often some workers accepted a relatively small wage increase and this weakened the position of the other striking workers.

The workers in Durban soon realised that only worker organisations could overcome these problems. After a strike ends, the worker organisation can preserve the unity of the workers and continue to press the demands of the workers. Worker organisations can also ensure that the workers in all the different factories make the same demands and accept the same offers. In this way the unity of the workers will not be broken.

So we find that soon after the strikes ended, the Durban workers began to organise themselves into unions to overcome the problems of poverty and lack of cooperation between factories.

We have seen that the Durban strikes were quite successful and the workers made many gains through their unified action. The workers would have made even greater gains, but they were faced with the problem of poverty and too little cooperation between factories. After the strikes the workers tried to overcome these problems by forming unions.

But the lesson from Durban is surely that only when all workers, African, Indian and Coloureds cooperate, can the workers improve their wages and conditions.

## WHAT DO WORKERS THINK?

This month ABASEBENZI spoke to three railway workers. They had come to the Advice Office after reading about it in ABASEBENZI and were looking for assistance.

The main reason that these workers came in was because they had a serious grievance - they could not get any response from workers or the bosses with regard to this grievance.

One of them, whom they had chosen to discuss this grievance at the Advice Office, James Radebe, had 15 years service with the railways. He told us that every year workers who lived in the Transkei and Ciskei had been given six months' leave to look after their interests at home. And now they are to be given only three months. This is a very serious problem for someone who is forced to live in two worlds. The workers were not given any reasons why their leave had been cut.

There is a Staff Association where all the workers, "Coloured", Black and White

are represented. However, the black workers are dissatisfied with their representative. They feel he has been intimidated and is too afraid of victimisation. On one occasion he has reported back to the workers incorrectly. The workers will not raise this problem again until they have elected a new representative who has their interests at heart.

However, it appears as if it is not only the spokesman's fault that the workers are badly represented. The system of satisfying workers' grievances is itself inadequate. James Radebe told us that their spokesman has no influence in the decisions made by the Staff Association. No matter who they elect to represent them on the Staff Association they will still have little say in matters affecting their own lives.

The strength of the railway workers should lie in their own unity. But the question of six months or three months leave does not directly affect those workers who live permanently in Cape Town. They are not prepared to run the risk of victimisation for the problems of their fellow workers. Bosses try to use the division between urban and contract workers for their own benefit. However, as is shown in the article on the Durban strikes, the workers cannot hope to achieve anything unless they stand together at all times.

James Radebe told us that workers were too scared to lose what few privileges they had. They were too worried about their own problems to act in the interests of all the workers, together.

There seem to be three problems which seriously affect railway workers.

Firstly, their elected representative is unreliable and ineffectual. This points to the importance of workers' electing representatives who hold their interests at heart.

Secondly, the system of representation will not satisfy the workers' grievances. For this reason workers cannot rely on the forms of representation they are now granted, they can only rely on their own unity.

Finally, the railway bosses are exploiting the divisions between workers. As long as they are allowed to do this, the workers will not have strength.

#### WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION

The Workmen's Compensation Act is the law which gives some protection to workers injured in an accident at work. It allows

- 1) payment to a worker while he is off work
- 2) payment to a worker who has been permanently harmed
- 3) payment to the dependants of a worker who has been killed
- 4) payment of the burial expenses of a worker who has been killed
- 5) payment of the medical expenses of workers injured.

The employer is meant to report all accidents, and money is set aside for workers falling into one of the five groups above. The worker should claim this money, either through the employer or through the Advice Bureau, who will write to the Workmen's Compensation Commissioner, who keeps all the money.

Recently the government published a list of all the workers who have money owing to them, waiting for them at the Commissioner's office. The following are some of the Cape Town workers for whom there is a lot of money, together with their addresses from the time of the accident. If you know any of these people, tell them to go along to the Advice Bureau, so that a letter can be sent off to get their money.

Michael Dlisani (NIN 3941227), c/o Hygienic Dist Co, Eden Rd, Observatory R84.  
Notyaty Tshezi (NIN 1953051), c/o Aer Marine Stevedoring, P.O. Box 2790,  
 Cape Town - R26,25

Qulwana Butshi (NIN 4709010), c/o Table Bay Stevedores, P.O. Box 3270, Cape  
 Town - R113,90.