

MAY 2nd Issue

WORKERS AT WAGE BOARD

On Friday morning 3rd May, the government-appointed Wage Board met to hear evidence relating to wages of workers in the Fish Processing Industry. Many workers responded to pamphlets advertising the meeting, 30 workers in all. They came from all over the Western Cape, from Port Nolloth in the North, Lambert's Bay and Saldanha Bay in the South, as well as Cape Town.

The parties who had submitted evidence on behalf of the workers were called on to give their evidence first. After that, the employers put their case forward. Only two workers spoke to the Wage Board. This was unfortunate but understandable since the Chairman of the Wage Board was very strict in limiting the arguments very narrowly.

Many workers wanted to complain about their conditions as well as about wages, but in all cases the Chairman refused to discuss this.

The two workers who spoke made a good impression. The Chairman also cut the meeting short because he had to catch an airplane. Workers did indicate that they would have spoken if they had been given the chance.

It remains to be seen how much notice the Wage Board took of the workers and their representatives. All these people called for R35.00 per week as the basis for a living wage.

The employers offered less than half that per week. They said they could not afford to give more, but did not give any proof that this was the case.

Within the next few months, the Minister of Labour will decide the new minimum wages. Then workers will be able to see how loudly their voice rings under the present unorganized conditions.

CORRECTION

In our September 1973 issue of Abasebenzi, an article entitled "Clements Kadalie and the I.C.U." stated that Kadalie had made an application for ICU membership for the white Trade Union Council, SATUC, in 1928, and that the membership of the ICU at the time was 500,000 members. In the article a comparison was drawn between SATUC and the present TUCSA. This comparison was made to indicate the similarity in function between the two bodies - i.e. co-ordinating bodies of trade unions. We wish to emphasise, however, that the present TUCSA was not the body to which Kadalie made his application for membership. We also wish to correct a misinterpretation concerning the membership of the ICU at the time of Kadalie's application. While Kadalie claimed that the ICU had a membership of 500,000, this figure was exaggerated and the true figure was more like 50,000. Kadalie in fact applied for membership of SATUC in 1928 on the basis of 100,000 members.

EDUCATION COURSES FOR WORKERS ELSEWHERE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Service Organisations at Bolton Hall, Durban

In Durban, administrative and educational services to the registered and the African unions at Bolton Hall, the trade union centre, are provided by the Wages Commission from the University of Natal, the Institute for Industrial Education, Central Administration Services, and the Urban Training Project.

The Wages Commission provides help with the registration of African workers into one of the four unions or the Benefit Fund. The four

- unions are:
- i) the Furniture Workers Union
 - ii) the Textile workers union
 - iii) the Garment workers union
 - iv) the Metal and Allied Workers union

This is especially necessary on Saturday mornings when hundreds of workers come into Bolton Hall to sign up or to pay subscriptions. The Wages Commission members also go out to factories, and help in solving complaints brought to the Benefit Fund by the workers.

The Institute for Industrial Education (I.I.E.) provides a correspondence course in trade unionism for all workers. This year it has about 120 students. The I.I.E. also organises seminars for its students where the courses are discussed. The courses are in Zulu and English at the moment, but will be in more languages later.

Central Administration Services (C.A.S;) provides administrative assistance, office accommodation, secretaries, and transport for the unions and organisations belonging to it. These groups are nearly all in Bolton Hall but the same services are also provided to the African Unions in Pietermaritzburg.

Urban Training Project, with its head office in Johannesburg, has an educator in Durban based at Bolton Hall. He also provides educational courses for workers in unions, works committee members, and interested workers. The Urban Training Project work along closely with the I.I.E. and their educational program.

More than 60,000 workers are represented by the unions and the Benefit Fund in Bolton Hall, and the four organisations we have discussed briefly, provide the educational and administrative services for them. In addition, the Black Sash run a pass advice office and the students of the Legal Aid Clinic of the University of Natal intend opening an office in Bolton Hall.

HOMELAND LEADER ATTACKS PARALLEL UNIONS

At the same time, Mr. Barney Dladla of the Kwazulu Cabinet, has attacked the idea of parallel unions. He said that TUCSA (the Trade Union Council of South Africa - which has only white and coloured unions) was trying to control African unions by forming parallel unions. By establishing parallel unions, TUCSA hoped that the hand of white leadership would rest heavily on these new unions.

He claimed that TUCSA had moved to isolate the new African unions in Natal. It had helped during the 1973 strikes, and it had not condemned the government when four trade unionists were put under house arrest in January 1974.

"The registered unions are turning their backs on the African workers". It is these trade unions that were responsible for negotiating for thousands of African workers and "in many cases I am sorry to say that they agreed to the most shocking levels of wages for African labourers".

Mr. Dladla is well known in Natal among workers as a champion of their cause, and has intervened to help striking workers on several occasions. He has also addressed workers' meetings and encouraged the formation of trade unions.

WORKERS' ADVISORY PROJECT

The Workers' Advisory Project was established by a group of people which includes workers, students on the UCT Wages Commission, lecturers from the University and others. The aim of the project is to provide workers with background information on the labour situation in Cape Town, to provide education on the industrial legislation, and training in how to run works committees or trade unions, how to handle complaints, how to negotiate with management and so on.

The project consists of a lengthy "training manual" covering all these aspects (in English and Xhosa), and weekly meetings on a Saturday afternoon where discussions on the se different subjects take place.

The first meeting was held on Saturday, 4th May. Workers from 11 different factories and firms attended the meeting, which covered a general introduction to the course, and where workers gave their ideas of what should be dealt with in the course. The first sections of the manual were given to those who attended.

Workers were very excited about the course and keen to learn about the information they need in order to form a strong, united worker organisation. They were particularly keen to learn about the negotiating procedures laid down by law for determining their wages and working conditions and to be trained in the techniques of negotiating with management at their factories. These subjects will be covered soon in the course.

The workers also emphasised the need for more workers to join them and combine to form a united, well-informed force through which the workers could all strive together for better wages and working conditions. They emphasised the need for thorough education and training of workers if they were to be successful in their efforts and called on other factory committees to come to the Advice Project meetings, and on workers without committees to come and hear how to set up these committees.

These meetings will also deal with any individual problems which workers have - at the first meeting a number of specific problems about wages, working hours etc. were raised and dealt with individually.

The meetings can become an important meeting place for workers, where they can get together to hear about each others problems and victories, share in the knowledge which is built up from these experiences, and help to solve the problems of others.

It is hoped that the meetings will grow and that more and more workers will join those who have started it off. Workers from eleven factories is a good start - but for success, the workers from each and every factory must stand together and must have the background knowledge necessary to run effective organisations which can represent them.

The meetings take place every Saturday afternoon, at 2.30 in the B.E.S.L. Hall, Klipfontein Road, Athlone. All workers are welcome - those that have started the project need your support.

We hope to see you there this Saturday.

TUC visits S.A. as guests of TUCSA.

Between the 6th and 20th October last year, four leaders of the British Trade Union Council (T.U.C.) visited South Africa as guests of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA). The purpose of the visit was to find out about the level of worker organisation in South Africa, especially as regards Black workers. They wanted also to find out the degree to which workers participate in industrial negotiation, i.e. how effective was the machinery which the government provided for negotiations.

During their two week stay the TUC delegation saw many people who are in some way connected with labour in S.A., from the Prime Minister (Mr. Vorster) and the Minister of Labour (Mr. Viljoen) to unorganised Black workers. Mr. Viljoen told the delegation that improved communication channels had been set up in the form of liaison committees and works committees, but that Africans were not yet "ready" for trade unions. He said that a certain level of education, training, and experience was necessary before successful negotiations could be carried out by trade unions, implying that Africans lacked this. He, nevertheless, admitted that some Whites, especially Afrikaners, also lacked these prerequisites for trade unionism. However, he does not legislate against, or prevent them from joining or forming trade unions.

Mr. Vorster was informed by the delegation that some Black unions had been operating very successfully. When asked why these unions were not allowed to register, he replied that he could not make any exceptions to the rule and that these unions were political in nature.

Mr. Viljoen stressed the importance of education in trade unionism, and promised that compulsory education for all Africans would come. He did not say when.

The delegates met representatives from the Central Administration Services (C.A.S.) the offshoot body of the Garment workers in Durban. The education wing of C.A.S. the Institute for Industrial Education (I.I.E.) also held discussions with the delegates. Numbers of the welfare wing of N.U.S.A.S., who work with C.A.S. and the I.I.E. met members of the delegation in Durban and Cape Town. Other bodies who met the delegation were the Urban Training Project, who operate in Johannesburg and who held 2 training seminars for workers in Cape Town last year, the South African Institute of Race Relations South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA) and a number of African Trade Unions. Naturally enough, TUC met TUCSA and representatives of other white trade unions.

The delegation felt that social and political factors were extremely important in labour relations in S.A. They were made to feel that Africans were aware of and in fact, resented the discrimination practised against them. They also gained many impressions from their interviews with managers, who recognized that Black workers were deprived of an effective voice in negotiations yet who were quick to call in armed police when their workers showed their discontent.

The delegation recognized the impatience of many Black people who wished to take part in full industrial negotiations, also that the African labourer was a permanent and not temporary - as the Government likes to think - worker in the towns.

The TUC leaders recognized that because in South Africa's expanding economy, Black labour was becoming an increasingly greater force, the need to organize Black labourers into effective bodies (which TUC believe must be trade unions and NOT works committees or liaison committees) is an urgent necessity. They believe that only by standing together united in thought and action could workers anywhere in the world, overcome the forces that exploit them. They saw no difference in South Africa.

They therefore promised to carry out the following to assist black workers:-

- i) discourage the emigration of white workers to S.A. who always take the jobs that local Blacks should be filling
- ii) to set up a presence in South Africa to assist Black workers organise trade unions
- iii) to raise R175 000 for the organization and education of Black workers, from trade unions all over the world, not only in Britain.

These premises were made several months ago, yet nothing has arisen from them so far. It is obvious that only by standing together with all other workers can workers goals be achieved. It is no good relying entirely on other people who have their own problems, e.g. TUC because they are too far away, and also have their own worker problems; the Government and employers whose interests are directly opposite to those of Black workers; and White trade unions, many of whom see Black unions as a threat to their power and position. These people can never share South African workers problems and their promises must be seen in this light. No one except the worker will solve his problems. The problems of a single worker are always shared by other workers, and therefore it is important, as TUC agreed, that workers organize themselves into trade unions. But it is only the workers who can organize themselves properly. It is only the workers who, having organized themselves can put an end to exploitation. In this, Black South African workers have the blessing of TUC, and trade unionists over the whole world.

Steeldale Works Committee,
Granville Avenue,
EPPING.

The Steeldale Works Committee was started on the 19th June, 1974.
There are over 400 workers in our firm.

Mr. Lampbrecht appointed men who were to represent us on the Steeldale Works Committee. He told our employer to take notice of our complaints and requests and that should he fail to do so we should let him know.

So far the Committee has succeeded in some of its attempts, e.g. its fight for better wages and working conditions, sacking of employers without valid reasons, sick leave without pay etc. We discussed these things very successfully with our employers. Therefore the committee is a liaison between employers and employees.

We received a paper called Abasebenzi issued by the Wages Commission, which gave us more information about works committees and how the Advice Bureau can help us. The Advice Project gives us lessons every Saturday afternoons.

The establishment of our works committee has been a great help to us employees and through it our employers have tried their best to satisfy our needs.

We thank you for the good you have done for us.

Thank you.

R.V. SIZANI