

THE WORKERS AT UNION WHALING COMPANY STAND TOGETHER

On Monday 21st April about 300 workers at the Union Whaling Company went on strike. They returned to work when Management promised to answer their demand for higher wages on Friday 25th. On that day a rise of R5 a month was offered, plus another R3 in July. "Abasebenzi" interviews the workers, and this is what they said.

THE STRIKE

Abasebenzi : When did you decide to ask for better wages?

Workers : We had been talking in the compound about this. Then at the beginning of April we asked the Liaison Committee to bring us a reply from management. There was no reply, so we sent them back. Management said that an increase would be given in July, not now. They also said that it was the Liaison Committee members who wanted an increase, and not the workers. We talked about this thing, and decided that we would show management who the workers are here. So on Monday morning everyone sat down.

NEGOTIATIONS

Abasebenzi : Tell us about the negotiations.

Workers : From the office they sent clerks, the factory manager, the compound manager, and so on. But we insisted that we must talk to the Managing Director. When the compound manager came he said they would fire some of us and give the rest of the workers their money. We all got up and said "If one goes we all go."

Abasebenzi : Were you happy with the increase you got on Friday?

Workers : No. Only ten of us accepted the offer. The rest of us still want R20 a month more for everyone. Some workers here have been getting only R58 a month.

THE UNION

Abasebenzi : How many of you are members of the Transport and General Workers' Union ?

Workers : Many of us, and more are joining since our struggle began. When management asks us if we are members of the Union we tell them : we are all members now, because we are standing together for our rights as workers.

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E D I T O R I A L

WAGE INCREASES

It is important for all workers in the METAL INDUSTRY to note that : because of the Consumer Price Index rise, while the current agreement is in force a substantial compensation of 15% wage increment has been made. (This means 6c above the hourly rate to the majority of Black workers). Make a special note too that this increment will be in effect from the 2nd of June, 1975 until 30th June, 1976.

Needless to say that this is mockery of wage increment, when judging the inflatory cost of living. All that it does is to keep one's head above the water. Is there anyone who can say this is enough? The obvious fact is that whenever the cost of living rate increases the employers fool workers by giving them something to keep them quiet.

Is it not true that wages for many Black workers do not cover the standard of P.D.L. - it's peanuts. But maybe we are responsible for all this exploitation we endure. When will the Black man stand up and fight against unjust exploitation of this labour? When will they unite and speak with one voice? The UNION, brothers. What do you think it is there for?

FACTORIES

The struggle of South Africa's workers reached a high point during the strikes of 1973. The strikes are over but the struggle continues. What can we do now to strengthen ourselves?

The first step is to organise ourselves in each factory. We must form groups to talk about problems in the factory and to organise other workers.

Leaders must be chosen to go and speak to the Union. But we must remember that the Unions cannot solve all our problems. They can help us and give us advice, as well as negotiate with management. The bosses will only listen to us when we, the workers are strong and united. Unity in each factory - that is what we must work for now.

WORKERS' POLICY

What happened at Romatex is not new. Moving us around to different departments or "retrenching" us is an old employer game. So is reduction of wages, and the employment of new workers at lower wages. Management can do these things when we are not organised.

But workers at Romatex acted well on another issue. When threatened with retrenchment, some workers demanded that management reinstate them in their original jobs. They won this demand. This is good worker management!

We know that Works Committees are useless. Abasebenzi believes that we can have some control over conditions of work and wages only if we are all members of Unions with Shop Stewards in all factories. Then we can all negotiate effectively.

HOW WE ARE FIGHTING TODAY- Different Tactics, one struggle

None of us will forget the Durban strikes of 1973. They will be written down in history books, but more important is the memory we carry forward in our struggle.

The bosses gave us better wages and works committees. They also fired some of our leaders. In some factories they made the jobs harder and the workers fewer. Using informers, they kept a closer watch on us than before. And all the time, prices kept rising.

For our part, we decided to strengthen and preserve our unity in trade unions: Textile, Metal and Allied, Furniture and Timber, Chemical and now Transport and General. We called on all workers to join and make the unions strong. We also tried to build good foundations in each factory and also in each department. We 'hastened slowly' when we had to.

Some factories have built up strength quickly. Others, where conditions have been more difficult, have been slower. For this issue of Abasebenzi we interviewed workers in four different factories, and asked them to tell our readers about their struggle.

THE FIRST WORKER JOINS

Abasebenzi : Could you please tell us something about your work?

Worker : I work at a Sugar Company. My job is to push sugar cane into machines.

Abasebenzi : How many people are there in your factory?

Worker : There are many, but I am the first one to join the Union.

Abasebenzi : How well do the workers and the management get on with each other?

Worker : Not well. We are not satisfied.

Abasebenzi : What are your complaints?

Worker : The first is the pay. We are paid only R1,25 a day. This is not enough for the hours we work. We work from 5 in the morning to 3 or 4 in the afternoon.