

- Irene S. : I'm sorry, I thought you knew about that. We demanded that the company speak with our Union representatives which they did. Our Union then asked the management to sign an agreement which covers everything in our factory from wages and working conditions to how and when a worker can be dismissed.
- Abasebenzi : That was a victory.
- Irene S. : Let me tell you more about this agreement. We get an automatic rise when the cost of living goes up. But as well as that the Union can negotiate every year for better wages.
- Abasebenzi : Did you get an increase this year?
- Irene S. : We got one of 17% but we feel that this is not enough and are going to fight harder in the coming months.
- Abasebenzi : What does the agreement say about the dismissal of workers?
- Irene S. : You know how in the past workers got fired for any little thing. Now he must be warned, at least. The fact is that the company must produce real evidence before they fire a worker. So its not easy for them to fire long-service workers or our worker leaders.
- Abasebenzi : What happens when there is a dispute in the factory?
- Irene S. : We approach the Shop Steward first of all. If he can't get the supervisor to listen to reason, he can approach the manager. If that doesn't solve anything, we call the Union secretary in. The big thing is : we've got a spokesman we can trust all the way. If it's necessary, the Union ends up taking the company to court.
- Abasebenzi : Irene, you seem to know all about the agreement.
- Irene S. : Why shouldn't I? You see, when our Union negotiated with the company they consulted us at every stage. We had many meetings at which this thing was discussed. It was all in the open. Not like Works Committees .....

## MIGRATORY LABOUR ON THE GOLD MINES

### THE FIRST WORKERS

The first workers were men from the land who came for a short time only. Most came because they wanted to earn only enough money to buy guns, which they needed to defend the land. The mine owners complained that there were not enough workers in the mines. We have seen how the government passed a law which said that all men had to pay taxes. This was a way to force people to work on the mines.

### LOW WAGES

Wages were low. The mine owners said that these men were farmers, not miners. They supported their families from the land, so they only needed a little money for the taxes. The men worked four or five months then went back home.

It was also at this time that the mine owners began building compounds for the workers. They crowded men together in rooms where there was enough space for beds. The food was bad. They were not allowed to leave the compound. In this way management controlled the workers.

### MANAGERS' UNIONS

Workers were not allowed to form unions but the mine owners formed an association. They all agreed to pay the workers the the same wage. In this way they kept the workers' wages down.

In 1897 the mine owners were strong enough to reduce wages from 21c to 13c. Extra police surrounded the compounds in case of trouble. It is interesting that white miners' wages were also reduced but they went on strike and got back their old rates of pay.

CONDITIONS TODAY

We still have this compound system today. We see it in the mines, in the sugar mills and in some factories. Men leave their wives and children for a long time. The land is often neglected because there are not enough people to farm it properly. There is less food and cattle.

BROKEN PROMISES CAUSE STRIKES

At the beginning of 1973 the management of Ropes and Mattings in Jacobs (which is part of the Frame Group) promised workers a 50c increase. This same promise has been the cause of a strike which took place in March this year.

INCREASES

Near the end of 1973 and again in 1974 workers received increases. At the same time a new factory was under construction. Later when workers were moved to this new factory their wages were reduced. Management said that the machines in the old factory vacated by workers would not be restored. But a short while later new workers were employed to work these machines also at a lower rate than before. The management had reduced wages to cover the cost of the new plant and at the same time to keep their profits the same.

BROKEN PROMISES

Again management were using their power to regulate workers' jobs and pay. So workers in Romatix demanded that management give them the 50 cents promised a long time ago, because their wages were worth less. Management rejected this demand. They had decided to cut off negotiations. So workers went on strike.

Once again it was a strike which shook management into negotiations. When will they learn? Management agreed to give the 50 cents increase. But, as usual, they set conditions to this increase. They changed the number of shifts from three to two and said they would retrench 66 workers in exchange.

One of our leaders was on the list for retrenchment. When he asked workers to help him they said "Leaders are always fired after a strike". He was not fired but shifted to another department as were the others threatened with entrenchment.

ARE LEADERS WORTH 50 CENTS?

Some workers and Union organisers think that this is not good policy for workers. They agree that workers were right to make their demands for an increase but the 50 cents would quickly be lost to deductions and by price rises. Also no one would act as a spokesman for workers demands if there is a chance they can be fired. What do workers think about this? What policy should workers adopt in a situation such as this?

POSTSCRIPT

Members of the National Textile Workers Union have rejected the Frame Groups' conditions for workers and have voted to send their officials back to try and negotiate again.