

Workers Must Meet

There are now many factory committees in Cape Town. This is a great advance for many workers who had no form of organisation before this but it is not enough to just form a committee and expect everything to improve by itself - we must be able to use our committees to advance further. This can only happen if there are regular meetings between the factory committee and all the workers ~~which~~ who elected it. But some managements have been hindering workers' meetings. The right to hold meetings is just as important as the right to elect a factory committee. Management knows this and it is usually necessary to struggle for this right as much as, if not more than, one has to struggle to establish a works committee.

The experience of workers in two factories shows us what can happen if management gets its way and what we can achieve if we realise that the power of factory committees lies in the unity of all the workers. At Gearings factory the management recently told the factory committee not to hold any more meetings with the workers on factory premises. Although the management had been forced to allow workers to elect a factory committee they have now found a way of making the committee useless to the workers. What is the use of a committee that only talks to the management and isn't responsible to the workers?

There are lots of ways in which management can nibble away at the power of the factory committee. We have heard stories of factories where the management is present when committees have meetings with the rest of the workers. We all know there are lots of spies among the workers. This means that workers are intimidated and do not feel free to discuss their complaints. When this happens the committee is more useful to the management than to the workers who elected it.

On the other hand, at Steeldale and other factories, workers have struggled for the right to meet together without management being present and have achieved success. The Steeldale factory committee meet with the rest of the workers once a month in Langa. The company allows the committee to hold general meetings in the company barracks in Langa. The committee and the management have agreed that any committee member who doesn't attend a meeting can be sacked from the committee. Any worker can in addition meet with committee members and call a general meeting any time. In this way the committee has strength - because it is still a committee OF workers, CHOSEN by workers, and RESPONSIBLE to workers.