

WHAT DO THE WORKERS THINK?

Abasebenzi spoke to a work-
last week to find out at
first-hand what problems he
faces at his work and what
solutions he thinks the
workers can find to their
problems. We hope to pub-
lish interviews regularly
in Abasebenzi. In this way
the workers of Cape Town
can communicate more easi-
ly with each other. They
can find out what some of
the difficulties are in
other factories.

We spoke to a member of
the Works-Committee at the
City Council Engineering
Department at Groenvlei.
He has been working there
for 5 years and earns R23.
a week. We shall call him
Mr. Sithole, though this
is of course not really his
name!

We first asked Mr. Sithole
about the Works-Committee.
The committee was formed
with the help of the Ad-
vice Bureau. At first work-
ers were afraid to join the
committee and did not under-
stand what it was about. Now
more and more workers are
understanding the benefit of
standing together. Most of
the workers now support the
Works-Committee, so that it
is petitioning to be regist-
ered.

Why do the workers need a
Works-Committee? Mr. Sithole
told us that there many prob-
lems at work that the work-
ers need to solve. He told
us, for instance, that the
workers used to travel to
work in a truck provided by
the City Council. This truck
was not covered. In bad wea-
ther, the workers used to
get soaked and would arrive
at work freezing cold. Then
the workers got together and
organized their own trans-
port. They now travel in a
truck that is more comfort-
able.

Mr. Sithole said that another
problem at work is that some
workers (like himself) work
12½ hours a day and get only

R23. a week. Some others
work for 8 hours and get
paid £35.40 a week. Manage-
ment claims that the more
poorly paid workers do not
work very hard and are doing
easy work. But Mr. Sithole
does not agree that this is
true. He also said that the
differences in wages help to
make the workers less uni-
ted. This is because some
of the better-paid workers
feel they do not want to
stand together and help
support the Works-Committee.
This is foolish, Mr. Sithole
said. There are many problems
that all the workers face.
These will best be solved
if everybody joins together
to face management.

Mr. Sithole gave us some
examples of problems that
all the workers should solve
together. For instance, they
have to travel long hours to
get to work. Also, the City
Council hires the workers on
a hire-and-fire basis. When
the workers grumble about
the poor conditions at work,
management just tells them
to find work somewhere else.
Mr. Sithole thinks that if
the workers have a strong
Works-Committee, if they
speak with one voice, then
they can solve these prob-
lems.

Mr. Sithole told us that he
has been on a training-
course at the Advice Bureau.
Although it was difficult to
find time to attend the train-
ing course, he said the course
has helped him in a number of
ways. He attended the course
with workers from other factor-
ies. Thus he discovered that
many other workers in Cape
Town face the same problems as
the workers at the City Coun-
cil. The Advice Bureau taught
him many skills that were need-

ed to organize and run the
Works-Committee. Mr. Sithole
said his committee decided to
join the Advice Bureau because
they were convinced of the
need for unity among all the
workers.

Duens Workers in Court.

Workers will remember
the disturbances at Duens
reported in a previous
Abasebenzi. Nineteen work-
ers were arrested by the
police for allegedly refus-
ing to work after 3 of
their fellow-workers were
dismissed.

These workers appeared in
court last month, and some
interesting statements
were made. The boss said
that the workers were dis-
missed, because their
work was not good enough.
The manager in charge of
the workers disagreed. He
said that they had been
dismissed because they were
worker representatives.
The trial continues in
January. In the meantime,
nearly all the accused have
found employment in other
factories.

A.G.M.

The annual general meeting
of the Western Province Ad-
vice Bureau was held on
Sunday 26th October. Re-
ports were given by Zora
Mehlemakhulu on behalf of
the organisers and by re-
presentatives of several
different works-committees.
A new executive was elec-
ted for 1976. The members
elected are M. Msutwana
(Standard Bank - chair-
man), M. Nosilele (Globe -
vice-chairman), M.W. Mpu-
ting (Mastertreads), L.
Obtwana (S.B.H.), R. Nqonji
(Anchor Yeast), Sidina
(Gearings), B. Mandita
(Printpak), M. Margis
(Printpak), S. Mazwenbe
(Lupini), R. Sizani (Steel-
dale).

market was being flooded by cheap imported goods. In April, 208 workers at Pam Knitwear in Cape Town and 100 workers at Hex River Textiles lost their jobs. In October, 2000 workers lost their jobs and 2 factories were closed in the cotton industry because prices of textiles fell. In the Engineering industry the story is the same. In June 450 men lost their jobs at Globe Engineering and in August Murray and Stewart (Marine) and Globe Engineering sacked 500 workers because there were not enough ship-repair jobs.

Why is this happening? The machinery is still in the workshops and factories and workers want work. What has gone wrong? The answer is that the whole Capitalist system is in crisis. In the rich countries such as Britain, the United States of America, Japan, France and Germany and in poor countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, India and Pakistan the story is repeated. No work and no pay for some and no overtime and less pay for other workers and rising prices for all. Not only is this a crisis but it is the worst crisis since the second World War. Workers are once again being taught the hard fact that an economy run by bosses must go through crisis in order to carry on. Sometimes crises can be postponed. Sometimes they can be made to appear in a different form, such as inflation. But crises are as much a part of the system as is working for a boss.

When a crisis takes place, there is always one central question that has to be answered. Who will pay for the crisis? Will it be workers or bosses? It sometimes appears (and they will always tell you) that bosses can do nothing about it. Bosses sometimes say it is the fault of workers and sometimes they say it is the fault of the

government. Nothing is more untrue! Let us look at the way crisis is dealt with in two countries to see why it is untrue.

In the United States of America, bosses are extremely strong. They have been able to simply close down factories when they were not making enough profits to satisfy the bosses. Workers lost their jobs and could not find new ones. The competition amongst workers for jobs has increased and bosses can now find workers prepared to work for low wages. With low wages and increased prices, the bosses will be receiving profits which they are satisfied and the crisis will be over. Today one worker out of every ten has no work.

In Britain the workers are tougher. If a boss threatens to close down a factory workers demand that the government take over the factory to keep it open and maintain the workers' jobs. Sometimes workers themselves have taken over the factories and run them without bosses. As this road has so many problems for bosses, they look to another solution. They turn to inflation to keep up their profits. Inflation is not as obvious as unemployment, not so easy to understand and they hope workers who would not accept unemployment will accept inflation. That is why in Britain only one worker in every 20 has no work, but prices have gone up nearly four times as fast as in America!

What lessons are there for workers in South Africa?

1). The crisis is not only found in South Africa but in every country run by bosses.

2). The crisis does not only take one form. It is not enough for workers to fight unemployment - they must oppose rising prices.

3). Economic problems do not just happen. They are managed by bosses and the

way bosses handle them depends on how much they think workers will put up with.