

Hospital strike wins big victory for workers

For 10 days in May 11 000 workers in 17 hospitals in the Transvaal went on strike.

Workers demanded:

- a living wage
- equal pay for equal work
- better working conditions
- an end to temporary employment
- collective bargaining
- stop-order facilities
- the recognition of their union NEHAWU
- the halting of the programme of privatisation of health services and the nationalisation of the health services

On the 10th of May the strike forced the TPA to meet NEHAWU to resolve the dispute.

An agreement was reached whereby TPA undertook to:

- recognise the union
- abolish temporary employment status for NEHAWU members
- to grant access to premises of TPA to NEHAWU officials
- to eliminate any discrimination based on race and sex

- not to take any disciplinary action against workers on strike
- to institute a 40 hour week
- a guaranteed maternity benefit

The agreement is a giant step forward for hospital and public sector workers. Just look, for example, at what the abolition of temporary employment status will mean for NEHAWU members:

90% of NEHAWU membership were classified as temporary workers or non-classified workers. Temporary workers have no rights and no benefits. They can be dismissed at 24 hours notice.

They have no clear job descriptions. Some workers were still regarded as temporary workers - despite having worked for up to 30 years. The hospital bosses justified their low wages on the basis of their temporary status. This system has now been abolished for workers who have been employed for long-

er than three months.

The strike was the result of numerous unsuccessful attempts by shop stewards and the union to meet with the authorities in Pretoria to discuss workers' problems.

On the 2nd March 1990 there was a public sector march involving all public sector unions. The unions marched to the headquarters of public sector employers and presented them with a memorandum. A memorandum was presented at Hillbrow Hospital as well.

On the 27th March 1990 there was a march of all progressive health organisations from Coronation to J.G. Strydom Hospitals. Another memorandum was presented there which also raised issues of conditions of employment.

A letter was sent to the Minister for Administration and Co-ordination, Dawie de Villiers, requesting a meeting to discuss the demands present-

ed in the 2nd March memorandum and to explore the possibilities of co-operation between his department and the union and to discuss the usage of hospital facilities. There was no response. A similar letter was sent to the Minister of Health and Social Services, Rina Venter. There was still no response.

Attempts by shop steward committees, worker delegations and demonstrations to put pressure on the relevant Ministers to respond also met with no success.

It was on this basis that the workers decided upon an action. The strike action at hospitals was not intended to harm the lives of patients. The strike was caused by the intransigence and insensitivity of the authorities by refusing to listen to genuine demands of hospital workers. It was the authorities themselves who held patients lives at ransom through their reckless attitude towards the workers' grievances.

CAWU continues to spread its influence

The Construction and Allied Workers Union is continuing to spread its influence in the Southern Cape area, while the bosses carry on with their campaign of victimisation against CAWU members. CAWU members are responding militantly to this - strikes are taking place all over the Southern Cape.

The Mossgas Strike Workers in the Mossgas project at Mossel Bay are fighting for better wages and working

conditions. Mossgas workers come from all over South Africa. When they go home on leave, they struggle to get to their families on time.

On Wednesday 29 March all workers at Mossgas met and decided to down tools. They demanded an increase of R5.00 per hour. At this time the workers were earning a minimum wage of R2,15 per hour plus a 70c project allowance. They also demanded a longer Easter holiday and

buses to take them home for the holidays.

The 5 500 striking workers included members of three unions: CAWU, NUMSA and SA Boilermakers Society. NUMSA and SABS decided not to participate in the negotiations with management as they negotiate with SEIFSA at a national level. CAWU was thus forced to negotiate on behalf of all the workers.

There was strong solidarity

from artisans working on the project - most of the metal and mechanical artisans are foreigners. They supported the struggle of the exploited workers at Mossgas.

In the negotiations the workers won their demand for a longer Easter holiday - from 11 to 18 April - and buses to take them home. They also won an agreement from all the companies involved not to victimise any strikers, as well as wages for 2 1/4 of the 4 1/2 days they were on strike. The strikers decided to return to work on 4 April.

CAWU also negotiated wages for all its members at 10 major civil engineering contractors involved in the project. The agreement reached was signed for a period of 12 months. It was a victory for the workers - their wages were increased to R3,95 per hour and the contractors agreed to enter into a formal joint agreement with CAWU. This is the first time that civil contractors in South Africa have agreed to a joint agreement with the union.

CAWU salutes the strength and unity of the Mossgas workers!



Mossgas workers demonstrate in support of their demands. This is the first time civil contractors have agreed to a joint agreement with the union.

Every worker a COSATU member!