

May Day means world working class solidarity



French mineworkers burn South African coal in solidarity

May Day is an international working class day. In countries throughout the world - from the Soviet Union to Zimbabwe - workers will celebrate the unity, solidarity and power of the international working class. At the moment, the struggle in South Africa is on the minds of workers everywhere. Workers in many countries have gone on strike and refused to handle South African goods in solidarity with our struggle. International trade unions have supported COSATU and its affiliates financially and have mobilised support, pressure and solidarity action with our struggle.

Governments in many countries have been forced to impose sanctions on South Africa under pressure from their own workers. Many multi-national companies have had to disinvest from South Africa. The Botha

government is more isolated than ever before in its history.

Direct links
COSATU delegates have visited countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, America and the Caribbean to explain to workers what is happening here, to learn from workers what is happening in their countries and to strengthen direct links between workers. Trade unionists from Namibia have visited COSATU and close links are being built with Namibian workers. Recently massive strikes have been mobilised in countries like Zambia, Spain, Phillipines and Czechoslovakia, while large student demonstrations have happened in France and China. On May Day we remember we are not alone. Workers everywhere are fighting against poverty and hardship. Through May Day we reach out our hands to other workers. We stand together for each other.

Namibian workers get organized

COSATU has established close links with the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). A few months ago 4 officials of NUNW were invited by COSATU to visit and build links with our affiliates. *Cosatu News* spoke to our Namibian comrades at the end of their two week visit:

Our visit here was very useful. We have learnt how the workers need to be organised from the shop-floor, how they need to involve themselves in everything. Discussing issues that relate to their lives, not only in the factories but in the residential areas. Workers are the ones who control the union. They know how best to set up strong unions that are capable of seeing to the interests of the workers.

In SA there are a lot of people and it takes more effort to organise. In Namibia the

population is smaller, its less complicated, less industrialised. The distances in Namibia are a problem. People don't regularly come together. There are laws that prevent people from moving. Special permission is needed to go somewhere.

Each and every industry needs to have its own union for that industry only. We set up workers committees - what can be referred to as shop-stewards committees - in the mines to lay a solid basis for forming the mineworker union. The members belong to various departments. We have also set up workers committees in the food and breweries industries, in the municipality, the metal and catering. In some cases we have tried to combine some of the industries, and set up joint workers committee. We have launched our food and mining unions.



Worker rally in Namibia

There have already been a number of strikes. Some big and long and courageous strikes. They are part of building the unions. In FAWU, for example, we had an abattoir strike where there were solidarity strikes and blacking action. The workers lived up to the union's motto - An injury to one is an injury to all.

More recently over 500 fisherman at Lauderitz went on strike for nearly 2 weeks. The strike won big wage increases and better conditions. It was one of the biggest and most significant strikes since 1971.

There are a lot of South African companies in Namibia. In fact most companies. What is relevant here is that SA is the one that is occupying the country. The workers in Namibia are subjected to the same apartheid laws and

capitalist exploitation as SA workers.

SA is the main force maintaining capitalism - the workers are subjected to low pay, the denial of their rights - same as SA. So getting the solution, they have to have solidarity, to unite with, SA workers. Both workers in Namibia and SA are part of the bigger world working class movement fighting capitalism - the cause of all hardship and suffering.

The workers in Namibia and SA should hold seminars, exchange views and build direct links with each other. We have been making contact with unions and workers here who work for the same bosses as workers in Namibia. They need to join together. Workers here are better organised and could put pressure on management for

us. Wages are very low in Namibia - a lot of workers earn about R70 p.m. Namibian workers need a living wage. South African and Namibian workers should fight for this together.

The tasks of the liberation struggle is to organise the oppressed people in Namibia in such a way that they all get involved in the struggle. Problems face all oppressed. So they will try and organise and involve themselves. This includes workers who create their own organisations and define their own role in this process. In setting up strong unions, workers create favourable conditions for the broader mass to take part. The only solution for everyone is to do away with the system and establish a society that is free of classes.



The General Secretary of the National Union of Food Workers (Namibia) Cde John Pandeni