

LESSONS FROM OUR CLASS STRUGGLE

In 1946 a big conference was held to form a black Mineworkers Union. The main representatives at the conference were from the ANC, the Communist Party and the organisation of black mine clerks. At that time, the ANC and CP were not banned.

This was during the Second World War. It was a bosses war. Bosses from different countries were fighting to decide which would be the most powerful capitalist country. They were also hoping to bring capitalism back to the Soviet Union.

Like with every bosses war the bosses used the people to kill for them - and to be killed instead of them.

In South Africa the bosses had a big problem. Many whites supported Germany while the government supported Britain. The government looked to black people for more support. To get this support they were prepared to talk about reforms.

They talked about abolishing pass laws and giving rights to black trade unions.

For workers the talk about reforms was less important than what was happening to workers. The truth was that things were getting worse and worse for workers everyday.

In the towns conditions were terrible - much worse even then today. The townships were like the resettlement camps in the bantustans. In these terrible conditions the government tried to force people to pay more and more rent. All prices were going up much more than today.

For workers these terrible conditions were more important than any talk of reforms. In 1942 and 1943 there were many many strikes. There was massive unrest action in the townships - especially where Orlando is today. Thousands and thousands of workers joined trade unions.

FORTY FIGHTING YEARS

There was a united trade union federation called the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU). On the mines there was anger. Price increases were even harder for mineworkers. They could not go into town to look for cheaper shops. They had to buy everything from special mine shops where prices were even higher. The same type of shops that miners are boycotting today. Each year at the conference of the Mineworkers Union delegates said - "We must strike for higher wages". And each year the decision was - "Now is not the right time".

It is true that the Mineworkers Union faced a problem in organising a strike. It was not organised on all mines. On some mines only the clerks were organised - not the underground workers. But mineworkers were ready to mobilise - just like other workers in the factories were doing. Many mineworkers felt that as each year passed the chance of winning a miners strike were getting worse.

By 1945 the government stopped talking about reforms. They had seen the militant struggles

at the 1946 Mineworkers Conference the demands from delegates for a strike were stronger than ever. In April, the conference voted to organise a strike. The strike

began in August. The strike was the most powerful that had ever been organised in South Africa. More than 100,000 mineworkers were on strike. But the big problem for the strike was isolation.

The wave of struggle and militancy in the factories and the communities had died down. This meant that the government had more time and force to use against the miners. And it also meant that it would be harder to mobilise solidarity action in the working class behind the miners.

At first CNETU called for a general strike in support of the for the strike the police came in and arrested some CNETU leaders. Some workers did start a strike in support of the miners. But then CNETU decided to drop the call for a general strike. The mineworkers were left to fight alone. The government sent thousands of

armed police into the mines. Many miners were killed. After 2 weeks

the miners were forced back to work by the guns of the police

of the working class. They made new laws to ban strikes. On the mines they made a new law to ban

all meetings. Conditions for a strike on the mines were getting more and more difficult.

What are the main lessons from the 1946 strike?

- * the strike was made stronger because it was called by a national delegate conference

- * the strike was weakened because it was left isolated

- * worker solidarity action was uneven and there was confusion because of the dropping of the call for a general strike

- * the strike call came a year after a whole period of mass working class militancy

It's time the workers dictate to the dictators



Like in South Africa, the class struggle in Chile is getting sharper as workers build and lead mass action against the bosses military dictatorship in Chile.

In the past 6 months there have been a number of worker-led mass demonstrations against Pinochet's dictatorship. The strongest action was a successful 2-day national general strike in July.

But, after an assassination attempt on Pinochet in September, the dictatorship has hit back at the mass movement. A State of Siege has been declared.

Under the State of Siege the opposition press has been closed down; thousands of trade unionists and activists have been arrested and opponents of the dictatorship have been murdered by death-squads.

At the moment there is a stalemate in the struggle. The mass movement opposing the dictatorship is too strong to be smashed by the State of Siege. And the leadership

of the different opposition organisations are too divided to unite in mass action against the Siege.

The Pinochet dictatorship has been in power in Chile for over 13 years. In 1973 Pinochet led a military coup against the democratically elected socialist government of Allende which had mass support among workers. About 30,000 activists were killed by the army after the coup and thousands and thousands went "missing".

Since then Pinochet has ruled through a reign of terror against the exploited of Chile. His brutal dictatorship has enjoyed the unconditional support of big bosses in Chile, monopoly capitalists of the whole world and American and British imperialism in particular.

His political and economic policies have been designed to make sure that bosses profits rule supreme and that any resistance to this is crushed.

But today things are changing. With over 11% of Chileans unemployed and 75% of all workers earning less than R200 per month, workers have been forced to fight back.

The Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) - which has joined together with other left-wing socialist organisations in the Democratic Popular movement (MDP) - and the Communist Party-linked Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) have strong support amongst the urban working class.

But they are not the only opposition groupings in Chile. There are a wide range of organisations opposing Pinochet - including the liberal National Accord - some of which have support from disillusioned bosses and the middle class in Chile.

Like in South Africa, the problem of unifying the oppressed behind a common programme of action is a big one. The leader of the

MDPG, Correa, says that the "weakness and division of the opposition is the main reasons Pinochet is still in power."

The immediate tasks facing Chilean workers are how to defend themselves and their organisations against the State of Siege. An attempt to mobilise another general strike in September against the Siege failed because of division amongst the leaders of opposition organisations over whether to build the strike or not.

Now Chilean workers are asking How can we unite the opposition organisations in common disciplined action to defend ourselves against the State of Siege?

- *How do we organise that united action with different organisations keeping their independence?

- *How can we guarantee the political programme of united action?

- *What do we want after Pinochet - capitalism or socialism?

Smashing the paper monopolies to pulp



The pulp and paper shop stewards council met in Johannesburg in mid September to plan for wage negotiations. Over thirty delegates, all members of the Paper Wood & Allied Workers Union (PWAU), attended the council which was formed three years ago.

The delegates came from all corners of the country. They brought the demands of workers employed by companies producing pulp & paper - Mondi, Sappi, Carlton and Nampak Paper. The aim of the council was to draw up uniform demands and to discuss strategies for winning a living wage in 1987.

After meeting for two days the council made the following major decisions:

- * we will fight for one set of demands in each company

- * we will fight to negotiate at a national level and refuse to be divided into separate plants.

- * we will fight for decent wage increase this year.

- * we will fight for other improvements - eg a 40 hour week.

- * we are determined to win May Day and June 16 as paid holidays this year.

PWAU is developing into a powerful force in the pulp and paper industry. The industry is made up of 18 paper mills nationwide employing about 10,000 workers. PWAU has now organised majority support at 16 of these mills, and we have over 65% membership in the industry as a whole.

On the other side the bosses are well able to afford decent increases. All the mills are owned by three big monopolies - Anglo, Barlows and Gencor.

This year we plan to fight for a living wage. But it will all depend on the unity and fighting spirit of the workers. In particular we will be aiming at the Gencor owned Sappi mills. Gencor pays by far the lowest wages in the industry.

Mourning together

Q : Comrade, did your factory come out in solidarity with the mineworkers killed at Kinross?

A : Yes, SAB in Cape Town has two plants and both were solidly behind the national call for the commemoration of our NUM comrades.

Q : What solidarity action did the SAB workers take in Cape Town?

A : The call for solidarity action in our region came late. We took work stoppages at both the factory and the delivery depot. We downed tools for one hour and held our meeting in the workplace.

Q : What form did the solidarity action take?

A : We discussed the struggle of mineworkers. We discussed the safety stewards. We see the problem of health and safety in the workplace as an issue facing all workers. We took a decision to contribute some money to fund for the families of the comrades. Finally we held a short commemoration service led by the workers in the factory.