



Dalton workers on the march to Pietermaritzburg after striking at Union Co-op.

Colgate: worker unity wins historic battle

A NUMBER of recent disputes have highlighted the importance of organised workers supporting each other in their hour of need.

The main reason for FOSATU's formation two years ago was to create unity among the many small and divided unions which had grown up in South Africa in the previous five years.

This unity is paying off now. The Colgate-Palmolive dispute, the Leyland, the Union Co-op and the Stag Packing struggles have all shown the importance of Worker Solidarity.

COLGATE PALMOLIVE

The value of a trade union federation like FOSATU can be seen most clearly in the Colgate dispute. Colgate is an American company which has branches all over the world. It has signed the Sullivan principles, and was seen by itself and by others as one of the most progressive firms in the field of labour relations.

The emptiness of this claim and of the Sullivan principles were exposed when, the company refused to speak to the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) for over a year, or to negotiate wages or working conditions except through a useless industrial council.

The C.W.I.U. therefore called a conciliation board to try and settle the dispute and at the same time began preparing for a strike and for a national boycott of Colgate products. All FOSATU affiliates were consulted about the plan and, a month before the boycott was called, agreed to give their support.

After two days of talking the conciliation board negotiations deadlocked. The 30 day 'cooling off' period laid down by the law before a legal strike could take place had the opposite effect. Mass meetings were held in a Colgate canteen, and a Colgate song was composed. Outside of the factory the full weight of FOSATU was thrown into a national boycott of Colgate products.

The results could be felt within two weeks of the boycott call. In the 1 500 strong Alusaf factory in Richards Bay, in the 6 000 strong Volkswagen factory in Uitenhage, in the 2 000 strong Salcast factory in Boksburg and in many other concerns, workers went to work with boycott stickers all over their overalls.

FOSATU members also called on their community support. Traders in Richards Bay, Uitenhage and the East Rand agreed to remove Colgate products from their shelves; children of FOSATU members distributed pamphlets in the streets.



Elsewhere FOSATU affiliates more directly gave a helping hand. Transport and General Workers Union members posted boycott Colgate stickers on their buses, on the East Rand; C.W.I.U. shop-stewards in Durban approached their managements to demand that they speak to Colgate/Palmolive, and bosses in many industries on the East Rand began to fear a general sympathy strike.

All this happened before the boycott got into full swing. Obviously it would bite hard once a strike had taken place. Realising this, Colgate management finally came to their senses, and agreed to negotiate with the union face to face.

The Colgate boycott was an historic event. It was a planned boycott, and not one organised

after a defeat had already taken place; it was organised mainly by FOSATU members themselves, and it took place to defend a principle of vital importance to all workers. It gave a message which no-one can mistake: It doesn't pay to play with FOSATU unions.

LEYLAND

While Colgate workers were boiling, a bitter struggle was being fought by the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers at Leylands' Cape Town car plants.

By the beginning of this year wages at Leyland had fallen far behind those paid to other car workers in South Africa. After fruitless negotiations with Leylands bosses, workers took the decision to strike.

The bosses refused to give in, and recruited scabs to take the workers' places. Some union members returned to work but over 500 stayed out for 6 weeks.

Leyland workers held meetings with their communities all over the Cape peninsula and these gave generous support. Money was raised, scabs were discouraged from taking union members' jobs and production suffered in the plant.

Support was also pledged by Leyland car workers in Britain, who threatened not to handle parts exported to South Africa, by the International Metal Workers Federation, and by FOSATU affiliates.

Late in July this powerful display of solidarity received its reward. The Leyland bosses resumed negotiations with the union and agreed that union members would be taken back.

The Leyland bosses have learnt a lesson. They planned to break the union but for six weeks of hardship union members kept their unity and refused to give in.

Leyland will think twice about taking such action again. And workers in South Africa have been

given a lesson of courage and endurance to inspire them as their struggle goes on.

STAG PACKING

The Colgate and Leyland disputes are settled for the moment but other struggles continue. The Stag Packing Company in Springs recently locked its workers out in the middle of recognition negotiations with the National Union of Textile Workers.

The Union Co-op Sugar Mill in Natal dismissed 600 workers belonging to the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union who struck when a free food allowance was withdrawn. Both are FOSATU affiliates.

Both are receiving aid from other FOSATU unions and sympathetic community bodies. At public meetings held in Springs, delegates from Cosas and Azapo pledged their support for Stag Packing workers and a shop stewards council of 100 worker representatives from 5 FOSATU unions recently promised all the support it could give. Similar meetings in Pietermaritzburg have offered help to Union Co-op workers.

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Stag Packing is owned by the British-based Turner Newall company. An equally backward British company is Wilson Rowntree which owns a factory in East London. There a dispute led to the sacking of 600 workers. Two months after their dismissal, Wilson Rowntree workers called a boycott of Wilson Rowntree products.

FOSATU has given its support to their struggle and calls on all workers to boycott Wilson Rowntree sweets. It has also called on the police to release detained leaders of the South African Allied Workers Union to which Wilson Rowntree workers belong.

As the Rowntree boycott pamphlet says: 'an injury to one is an injury to all.'