FOSATU and other unions put their muscle behind a country-wide consumer boycott

BOYCOTT

FOSATU together with the Food and Canning Workers Union, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union, the General Workers Union, the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association and the National Union of Mineworkers have decided to put their weight behind a national consumer boycott in protest at the declaration of a State of Emergency.

And, at a meeting at Wilgespruit near Johannesburg on August 17, the unions set up a national committee to monitor the progress of the boycott on a month by month basis.

The national boycott of shops in the central business districts is in support of four demands:

• the lifting of the State of Emergency.
• the removal of the police and the army from the townships.
• the release of all detainees.
• political rights for all South Africa’s people.

Should none of these demands be met, the unions have committed themselves to taking stronger action.

Sporadic boycotts have already begun in a number of areas, however the decision by these strongly-organised unions to involve themselves will spread the consumer boycott to all of South Africa’s major towns and cities.

A resolution taken at the meeting warned that the unions would take solidarity action against any employer who dismissed or retrenched workers, particularly CCAWUSA members, because of the boycott.

Miners’ strike

At the Wilgespruit meeting the unions expressed ‘strong support’ for the miners’ struggle for a living wage and for their planned strike due to start on August 25.

Union delegates were horrified to learn of the appalling minimum wages being paid on the mines — R136 per month for surface workers and R106 for underground workers (see article on page 10).

The unions said that the National Union of Mineworkers’ demand for a 22 percent increase in the light of these wages was ‘entirely reasonable’.

They condemned the Chamber of Mines’ stubbornness in not accepting this demand.

The unions also expressed concern at the rumours that some mining houses were building up weaponry in preparation for the strike.

At the meeting the unions committed themselves to taking solidarity action in support of the NUM strike.

Unity

Meanwhile, a final date has been set for the Inaugural Congress of the new super federation. It is November 30-December 1.

At a recent unity meeting at least 26 unions said they would present paid-up membership figures and their constitutions to a credentials committee in preparation for the launching congress.

The total membership of the new federation could well be in the region of 400 000.

The credentials committee will also assist unions in taking steps towards merging with other unions in the same industrial sector so that in the near future there will be only one union for each sector.

The message is clear, but will anyone listen to it? — an NUTW member waves a placard at the KwaThema funeral.
Mass detentions, now a turf war

Over 1,500 detained since July 20

Siyolo Mashigana (CWU shop steward); Issac Setevo (SPAWU member); D. Mawela (CWU shop steward); J. Lesibola (SPAWU shop steward); and S. Mathulika (trenches with MAWU member from Siemba). Some of these have been released.

Another advantage of the State Emergency is that now any member of the security forces (army or police) can detain someone for at least 14 days without a warrant. This 14 days can be extended by the Minister of Law and Order.

Under the Internal Security Act a person could only be detained after a warrant had been signed by a high ranking police officer.

Also, in terms of the Emergency regulations, detainees have even fewer rights than normal detainees.

Even whistling and singing are an offence under these regulations and can be punished by either forced labour, a fine, corporal punishment, or the taking away of one or more meals.

The State of Emergency also makes it possible for the security forces to restrict what is printed in the press about the detentions. It is a criminal offense to report the detention of anyone held without the permission of the Minister.

Moreover, it was said that no member of the press can be forced to rely on the lists of detainees being handed out by the police. There is no guarantee that the list contains the names of all the detainees.

30,000 in KwaThema funeral march

FIFTEEN coffins were carried in a mass procession of over 30,000 people to the graveyard in the Springs township of KwaThema on July 23. This was the first funeral to be held after the State of Emergency had been declared. Most of the killers wanted to attend the funeral must have been wondering whether the police would let them attend. This was the first time of attend, judging from the large number of people wearing POSATU union shirts. Young men and women in union T-shirts stood guard alongside the 15 coffins with fists raised. In one of the coffins was Metal and Allied Workers Union member Elias Ngezabo who was shot dead by police on his way home from visiting a friend. Everyone from the youngest to the oldest fervently sang freedom songs while they waited for the speeches to begin. MAWU organiser Moses Mavimbo told the crowd, "We can see that freedom is near. You must unite. You must not be scared." Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, who concluded the funeral by leading the mourners in a mass recital. We dedicate our souls anew to the struggle for freedom for all of us, black and white." It was only an hour before the march was due to begin that the police and commuters went to the obvious. About 20 Caprivi were parked nearby and police watched the proceedings through binoculars.

Maswato Mangoala

F. M. Botha's new 'weapon'

PRESIDENT P. W. Botha has discovered a new weapon in his attempts to combat the increasing internal pressure for economic sanctions against South Africa.

The new weapon is targeted at the home of all the migrant workers from neighbouring states and is being used in a bid to bring them home.

It is highly unlikely that President Botha would put this threat into action but if he did, the worst hit industry would be the mines.

The mines employ nearly 200,000 foreign workers — 49 percent of its workforce. Nearly half of these are from Lesotho, the rest are from Mozambique, Botswana, Malawi and Swaziland.

Many of families in those countries have no history of the wages sent home by migrant workers for their very survival. Last year the mines spent R4.2 million in wages back to the home countries of foreign workers.

The declaration of the State of Emergency and the mass detentions has led to increased pressure being brought to bear on overseas governments to take some form of economic action against South Africa. Since November last year in the United States of America thousands of people, including huge numbers of union members, have been demonstrating against apartheid.

Recently, the biggest anti-apartheid demonstration yet held took place in Washington when thousands of people carrying 50 black cabs formed a symbolic funeral procession marched to the State Department.
Long bitter struggle at Frame has ended

THE longest recognition struggle in South African labour history has come to an end.

Nearly 9,000 members of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) and their sympathetic supporters staged a sit-in at the Frame mill in Pinetown, near Durban, on 18 May 1979, to protest against the refusal of the management to recognise the union.

The management at Frame initially claimed that they were not aware of the existence of the NUTW, but eventually agreed to recognise the union.

The management at Frame agreed to recognise the NUTW and also agreed to a stop-work stoppage of all activities at the mill.

The company also agreed to negotiate with the union on all matters related to the recognition of the union.

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The management also agreed to recogni...
Tussle at VW over four kombis

Rowen's strike clause

PAID May Day won in Natal

Pension money needed by workers

Dock workers blockade S A cargo

Southampton dock workers belonging to Britain’s Transport and General Workers’ Union on Thursday July 31 refused to load a computer controlled milling machine ordered by a South African company. The workers believe the machine is intended for an Atlas aircraft company, and is a breach of the United Nations’ arms embargo which bans the selling of military equipment to South Africa.

Pension money needed by workers

A letter to VW management the workers set out their position clearly: 'Our union does not accept that due to the unwillingness of the company to meet the workers’ demands, such as improved lay off benefits, soreness pay and a decent living wage, workers should be forced to resort to the withdrawal of their pension benefits.'

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Durban’s bread strike

Huddled in cardboard boxes to keep out the cold, some 500 workers employed at Durban’s bread bakeries went on strike on July 22 in support of the demand for a living wage.

The bread strikers have given notice of an across-the-board increase of R2.50. However, their employers were only prepared to offer a R1.40 weekly increase.

For the first time, the power of the workers was brought home to every Durban household. The only bread available for the duration of the two-week strike was that bought by the small bakers in the major supermarkets. And this was not enough.

Daily bread queues became a common sight in most supermarkets and by the time most of the bread and rolls had been snapped up by shoppers.

Some workers even turned to loaves from far as Johannesburg and sold the standard white bread at prices that were above those laid down by the government. The workers said they were able to do this because the bakery management had failed to support their struggle, leaving the strike as the only way out of bondage.

One unfortunate hostess who was forced to buy a rare loaf of milk. Discovered by a fellow worker on his way home, the loaf was taken from him and then was stamped on.

At least two strikes involved in the Durban Tandang bakers – the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (SOFATU), the Food and Beverage Workers Union (CUSA), the black Allied Workers Union and the Natal Baking Industry’s Employees’ Union – presented a united front against the employers.

The bread strikers’ industrial council, the unions agreed to put forward joint demands and boycott suppliers who colluded and locked the jointly decided to call a strike ballot in which 70 percent of workers voted for strike action.

But cracks in this unity began to appear when three of the unions signed an agreement with the employers to vacate the premises when the strike began.

Only SPAWU members, at B B Bread and at Blue Ribbon, occupied the two bakeries to prevent the employers bringing in scabs to break the strike.

It was only after the employers took Supreme Court action at the end of the first week that the workers marched out of the premises.

53-year-old Mthulimavusi Zulu, who has worked at B B Bread for 33 years left the bakery only after the strike on July 22 and that was to give his family some money.

“I was terribly sick because of the cold, but I was determined to stay inside as long as I could. I was fighting for the survival of my family,” he told BOSATU Worker News.

In an interview with BOSATU Worker News, a group of B B Bread strikers told of how they had initially used company bags to cover themselves at night but these were not sufficient to keep warm and they were forced to use cardboard boxes.

At the time the company also closed the canteen. Management thought that they could starve us off the premises,” one striker said.

However, strikers’ families brought food to the factories and workers at the nearby Clover Dairies donates baskets of Amalawu.

One of the highlights of the period of occupation for the B B Bread workers was when during one lunchtime the Clover workers marched singing down Sydenham Road to the bakery’s gates.

Similar solidarity demonstrations were held at the Kegsells brewery and Durban (both on Sydenham Road) and also at Universal Mills, Forbs Kromco and Micivo.

In the second week, it became obvious that the other three unions were not prepared for a lengthy strike.

Their members began to drift back to work and the union officials started to push for a settlement.

At the end of the week when mediation did not bring an improved offer from the employers, the other three unions signed a return-to-work agreement.

The crumbling of the strike, SPAWU members decided at a meeting on the Saturday to return to work the following day and continue the fight for a living wage from within the factory.

The decision was to accept the employers’ offer as the minimum for the industry but push for an improved increase at plant level.

However, when the workers went back to the bakery, management refused to let them in until the workers signed a undertaking stating that they accepted the employers’ offer and that they would not raise the issue of wages for another year.

This the workers refused to do, as they were locked out by management.

On Monday August 6 after a marathon series of discussions, SPAWU managed to get the employers to agree that the demands of the strike would be raised at plant level. The workers were back in action.

The experience of the Durban bread strike has shown once again the importance of having only one union per industry.

The bread strike, even though the division among the strikers would not have occurred.

A HAUNTING voice singing “Zhihulele Mama, Nema ngamba ngoba ngcenge lale lalakhe, Iwe iSakhuLa Africa” (Don’t cry Maam, even if I die, I will be in South Africa) is heard every night in the streets. This song is sung in memory of those who have died for our freedom.

Everyday people are being killed in the streets, and in the last 10 months, 500 have been killed.

But, had the new FOSATU come into being which is the new name given by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the name which is sung by the SABC, Quo Chir, they would have prevented the kind of happening.

Workers in South Africa have begun to organise and in the last 12 months, the SABC Team from Bophuthatswana, “Shout, we have a representative!

FOSATU’s worker choirs

now feature on new record

It is FOSATU.

And the Durban has driven

their songs. “We call on you workers. Unite so we can conquer.”

As FOSATU unites move into more factories and with each new struggle, new songs are being sung.

Different music traditions have influenced these new worker songs.

Some of the choirs like the Sizakhele Transport Choir (the Lucky Crew) sing in the style of the Isakhamisa music of the Mzube compositions.

These choirs consist of only men in the Mzube tradition started in the men’s only hostels in the cities. An important part of their performance is the intricate dance steps which they do while singing.

Most of the popular songs sung in almost every FOSATU meeting use tunes from songs sung in church and the songs changed.

At the end of the FOSATU record, workers from the Braithwaite textile factory sing many of these songs. These songs were recorded during a lunchbreak at the factory.

One of the most memorable of the songs is “Swili Sihle”, which is sung by the male choir. It is sung by the male choir who have been singing for years.

The chorus is simple, “Swili Sihle, Swili Sihle, Swili Sihle.”

Under the influence of church music, many choirs have sprung up in FOSATU factories which include both men and women singers. Dancing is also an important part of their performance, but it is not the complex steps of Mhumbu but the bold, strident stamping of traditional tribal dancing.

The Province choir is one of the choirs which last year’s International Workshop impressed people as much by their dancing as by the song they sang “Swili Sihle”. “Swili Sihle” is sung by the male choir who have been singing for years.

A翃re, the record is a celebration of the newly discovered power that South African workers have in the form of an organised working class.

The FOSATU record is available at R5 and at R5 per copy on request to the FOSATU Printers, P.O. Box 8180, Dalrige 4012.
Brazilian workers carry sacks of gold-bearing rock at the Serra Pelada open cast mines. Over 50,000 workers work under appalling conditions at these mines in the Eastern Amazon.
Continuing his two-part feature which looks at the Workers' Party in Brazil, David Fig of the International Labour Research and Information Group explains why only four percent of the people voted for the party in the elections. He suggests that the main reason was that the party had not yet proved itself, however, there were also divisions among the workers and other groupings as to whether to give support to the Workers' Party.

was not important to get involved in par-

tary politics. The main task of the workers was to continue building the trade union struggle. There were still many problems inside the trade unions which had to be overcome, like getting rid of the leaders who supported the government and bosses, like fighting for shop stewards' committees inside all the factories, and so on. As a result, the trade union group thought that it was important to get involved in party politics, but they preferred to vote for the bigger opposition party, the PMDB. This party consisted of a number of bourgeois and some conservative politicians, and had the support of businessmen, students, cor-

nial and middle class interests. In some parts of Brazil, there was a good chance for the PMDB to do well in elections, because so many of the people were against the military dic-

tatorship. The PMDB had always opposed army rule and believed in democracy.

Brazil has two communist parties, both of which are illegal. They could not run their own candidates in elections. So, instead they gave their support to the PMDB. They felt that the Workers' Party represented only the 'narrow interests of the workers', while the PMDB represented a large variety of interests which to-
gether would make up a stronger force against the military government. As a result, the Workers' Party argued that the PMDB was not a party which spoke up for workers. It was a party which represented the views of the bosses. So it was difficult to see that workers would benefit by giving it support. The whole history of Brazilian trade unions showed that the workers had never benefited much from supporting parties which had no worker leadership.

Inside the unions, the Workers' Party supporters also argued that it was wrong for the supporters of the Workers' Party to give their backing to the strikers and yes-men of the politicians rather than from the military itself. Power would pass from the army back to the civilian president and the parlais-

tement. This was a great victory for the Workers' Party and the rest of the democratic movement which had been struggling to end 21 years of military rule.

But instead of agreeing that all the voters in Brazil could choose the next president, the army said that only 886 people could vote. These 886 consisted of MPs, state re-

presentatives and city councilllors. When the people heard this it was obvious that they could not not be able to vote and they were very angry indeed.

The Workers' Party who-
gether with other demo-

cratic organisations, launched a campaign for what they called DI-

RECT elections, where ev-

eryone would have the vote for the next president of Brazil.

One million protest in the streets of Rio

This campaign was huge. In the streets of Rio de Janeiro, one million people protested their right to vote. In Sao Paulo, even more came out into the streets to demonstrate — a million and a half. But the military still re-
sisted to allow everyone the vote.

The Workers' Party decided to boycott the election completely. This meant that the party-

ly MPs in Congress would not be part of the 686 who could vote.

The two parties that were left from the government party, which had supported the military in power for 21 years, and the PMDB opposition. Each of these put up a candidate. But the government party's candi-

date was a corrupt politician who was hated by many. This man was such a split, and many MPs left the government party and decided to vote for the PMDB candidate, for president.

In the elections, the PMDB-breakaway coalition won the majority of the 686 votes. So the PMDB candidate, Tancredo Neves, and the army's Vice-President Jose Sarney were ready to take office on January 15, 1985.

But on January 14, Tancredo Neves fell ill and after seven serious op-

erations, died in hospital in April. So even though the army is no longer di-

rectly in power, even though Brazil is sup-

posed to become a democr-

cracy in the future, the president today was one of the people who for many years supported the dictatorship.

- And most of the people in his cabinet are bankers, businessmen and politicians from the old regime. There are no workers in the cabinet. And the government has introduced policies in favour of the working class.

Struggle continues for a fully democratic Brazil

But most people under-

stand that the president was not elected by all the people of Brazil. The Workers' Party is now focused on its struggle for direct elections and for a fully democratic Brazil. As long as the government has no policy of full employment, no policy on education and so on. We need to see if the Workers' Party is to ex-

pose this end to get the political and economic reforms. Our focus is our stomachs, our homes, schools, democracy. The right to life — the basic rights, housing, transport, land and work. Democracy is not a word game, it's a practice. It's people being able to decide what they want to do. Their personal belief is the dictator-

ship of the proletariat and for us that means that the majority decides things. Until the workers take over the political and economic decisions, we won't have democracy in Brazil.

Lula is still president of the party and has also been elected to the exe-

cutive of the metalwork-

ers union which he once led. So he has direct contact with the shop floor and the struggles of the workers.

The Workers' Party has also given its support to a new balloting for a con-

feration of the more mili-

tant unions. The federation, the CUT (Central dos Trabalhadores), was formed in 1963 and does not enjoy recognition in Brazil under the state's harsh labour laws. But nevertheless it has support in many parts of Brazil and has con-

figured for an independent labour movement from government interfer-

ence and control. It has been the main force behind the huge strikes of May 1985, in which many thou-

sands of workers, civil servants and teachers united against the government's attempts to freeze wages and stop all strikes.

The Workers' Party still faces many problems in trying to organise and to spread work all over Brazil. Its main strength is still in the Sao Paulo area and in some rural parts of the South. It needs to work very hard to get its ideas across to all Brazilian workers. But as an experi-

ment in giving political content to the struggles of Brazil's workers, the fu-

ture of the Workers' Par-

ty is one worth watching.
CWIU climbs back at Sasol

EVER since the agreement with Sasol in March this year, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union has been working hard to rebuild and strengthen its organization at the Sasol plants and Sasol mines.

In under four months, the union has climbed back up to a paid-up majority in the plants. And as an added bonus, it now has a significant majority at the mines.

This is a tremendous achievement for the CWIU which during the November shutdown last year watched Sasol fire 6 000 workers and bus them back to the homelands.

In the March settlement, the company agreed to take back completely the terms of the workers. It also agreed to formally recognize union shop stewards.

The CWIU reports that all the Sasol I & II plants and the teams of shop stewards in the homelands have been using their extra rights to fight and win many issues.

Wages were one of the issues revisited and signed with Sasol management.

"Sasol makes vast profits but it is very stingy on wages. We want a living wage for all workers,\" a union spokesperson said.

In the wage talks, CWIU argued that management should not give a percentage increase as this would only widen the gap between the lower paid and the more highly paid workers.

"It was the workers earning only R500 per month that were suffering the most,\" the spokesperson explained.

The company finally agreed to pay workers on the bottom four grades an increase of R375 per month from July 1 — the next three grades received a slightly higher cash increase. This represented a 10 percent increase for the lowest paid, and an overall increase of 19.3 percent.

Meanwhile, on the mines, where the CWIU has over 6 000 members, things are really moving.

An agreement on shift standard rates has been completed in the coal workings and on-time and off-time drivers because of delays in the Chamber of Mines.

And already the union has begun to take up the "appalling" wages and working conditions which exist on the mines.

"Recently it came to light that a system of hidden dismissals was being practiced on the mines.\" Although, there is a disciplinary procedure, management was quoted as being round that the CWIU spokesperson said.

leave and renew the contract they were often told, and if the company is on strike.

Three-month legal strike

ABOUT 125 Metal and Allied Workers at Pinetown factory, Natal Die Casting, have been on a legal strike for more than three months.

A union organizer said that after two years the company has been struggling to get the company to seriously negotiate wages with it.

Things came to a head at the end of last year. The workers voted that the strike should continue and the company was only prepared to offer R25.

After the workers had been on strike for four days, Natal Die Casting sacked them all.

When one of the workers went back to the factory to find out what was happening, one of the workers recognized him. He then returned to the company and was rehired.

Some of the strikers have reported that the company called in the SAP's Security Branch to assist him to their over-staffed problems. The police even went to the union office to find an organizer. "The company has arrested one of the workers." Natal Die Casting has told the union they are going to increase the number of paced at the factory that it is not interested in talking to the union. The union has hired a consultant to talk to the strikers.

The strikers have been meeting in the union offices every week to discuss the situation and how to make the company accept.

MAWU has declared a dispute with the company and will be having its own meeting for it. The union is also raising money. The union has also raised money to help the strikers who have had to pay out soon parcels.

Metal workers dissatisfied with industrial council wage increases

DISSATISFACTION with this year's industrial council wage agreement has already led to strikes at two Transvaal companies — the first was at Silverton and the second was at Blyvooruitzicht.

In July, the Metal and Allied Workers Union refused to sign the metal industry's industrial council agreement for the third year in a row.

The union says that it would sign only if the employers agreed to pay a living wage.

At the June 26 industrial council meeting, the metal employers' association, Sefina, made its final offer of a 14c to 24c an hour increase. This has been accepted by the metal miners' union, NMA.

The first factory to take strike action in support of their wage demand was Silverton Engineering, a Pretoria radition factory organized by the National AutoOwners and Allied Workers Union.

After five days, the 400-old Silverton workers went back to the plant. The company agreed to pay them an immediate 15c increase and a further 5c an hour increase in October and December.

The workers had one condition: the company would not pay back 40 of the strikers who claimed they were involved in violence.

About 2 250 workers from five Siemens factories went on strike when the company and the Metal and Allied Workers Union deadlocked over the workers' demand for a R1 an hour increase.

Union sources said that during the strike negotiations, the company initially asked that across-the-board increases could only be discussed at the industrial council but that it prepared to give a wage increase of 6 percent, however these were non-negotiable.

Another issue was a matter of contention during the talks: whether Siemens would take back all the strikers. The company said it would not take back 40 of the strikers who claimed they were involved in violence.

After many rounds of talks, Siemens eventually agreed to negotiate the merit increases and that the 40 workers would only be suspended pending joining a joint union/company inquiry.

The strikers ran for July 30. However, according to union sources, the company is now refusing to hold a joint inquiry and instead is demanding that the company of the 40 suspended workers be removed immediately and immediately.

Meanwhile, at the four Transvaal Dorby factory, a data bank has been set up, and it has been said that it would be used to determine whether workers are prepared to take strike action over the issues of wages. It will be held on August 12.

The workers are demanding a R15,00 per hour minimum and a R6 an hour increase in October and December.

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Union sources report that Dorby has banned all general meetings and that it dismissed four shop stewards for holding a general meeting. However, according to union sources, the company is now refusing to hold a joint inquiry and instead is demanding that the company of the 40 suspended workers be removed immediately and immediately.

Meanwhile, at the four Transvaal Dorby factory, a data bank has been set up, and it has been said that it would be used to determine whether workers are prepared to take strike action over the issues of wages. It will be held on August 12.
Sarmcol: the biggest campaign ever

In Durban's Sydney Road about 3,000 workers from Dunlop and Clover Dairies marched up and down the busy road waving placards bringing traffic almost to a standstill. Similar marches took place in the Durban industrial areas of Jacobs and Congella.

At Macshandorp, the entire workforce at Pardalroy stopped work and demanded that their management send a telegram to Sarmcol. The company responded by locking out the workers.

Following the success of the stayaway, POSATU, with the backing of the community and student organisations, has now decided to launch a boycott of shops in Mariburg's main business area in order to keep up the pressure on Sarmcol. This is due to be launched on August 17.

Meanwhile, the city's Mayor and the Chamber of Commerce have at last realised that the Sarmcol dispute does involve them. It seems they too learnt something from the stayaway. At a meeting arranged by the Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce told MAWU that it intends to recommend to Sarmcol that it accept advisory mediation. The union once again stated that it was prepared to negotiate unconditionally with the company and the Chamber said it had a similar commitment from Sarmcol.

International pressure on the company is continuing to increase. British workers at Dunlop (which is now owned by BTR, who are involved in a retrenchment dispute with the company, have threatened to take action over Sarmcol as well.

Also, Britain's Trade Union Congress at the invitation of POSATU will be sending a delegation to investigate the dispute. And a debate on British television between the Sarmcol chairman and MAWU's Bernie Fannaroff has been arranged.
Working on the mines is no picnic!

South Africa.

At a special conference held at Welkom recently, delegates representing 29 gold and coal mines decided to take strike action on August 25 if the Chamber of Mines does not come up with a 'realistic' wage offer. This could be the biggest strike ever to hit the mining industry involving some 400,000 miners. The last major strike by black miners in 1946 involved only 70,000 workers. In this article, FOSATU Worker News takes a look at the background to the planned strike and at some of the other issues which have been taken up by the National Union of Mineworkers — South Africa's biggest and fastest growing union.

Workers and living conditions are very bad on the mines. In many of the hostels more than 20 workers share a room where ventilation is very poor and there is little privacy.

The vast majority of workers are migrants who come from various parts of Southern Africa to look for work. Besides accommodation, food is also a major grievance. At Kloof Gold Mine a worker complained about the quality of the food: "We often have to eat raw potatoes, fish with sardines and vegetables that are not properly cooked. The food is not properly done, it is either stiff or watery."

Because the food is bad, workers eat at the local shops and buy from community stores. But they soon discovered that the conditions there were no better so workers decided to boycott the shops until conditions were improved.

Fosatu, the regional centre of the NUM in Klerksdorp, explained the reasons for the strike. Workers are being sold old and stale food. The prices were very high and the workers were taxed on items which were exempt. Workers were also given searches and abused by the company owners. Instead of giving workers change, shop owners would give them vouchers.

Mineworkers have organised boycott campaigns and alternatives such as community food preparation.

At many of the Transvaal mines these boycotts have been successful. At Western Deep Levels Gold Mine workers won a major victory when the first recognition agreement between the union and shop owners was signed.

This agreement has given mineworkers new consumer rights. Now miners will now be discussed by both workers and shop owners. The opening and closing times of the shop will also be negotiated. Customers can return anything they are not satisfied with. And shop owners have promised to make sure that all food is fresh and not cooked.

It is clear that mineworkers are tired of being exploited and have decided to wage their battle not only at the workplace but outside as well.

As one worker said, "We are already earning low wages. The increases are also very small. So why should we let these shop owners rob us. We must organise and fight them also."

A new conference has been organised amongst miners. The growth of the NUM has mainly been responsible for this. Mineworkers have begun to see the power in organised unity.

For years mineworkers were thought to be stupid and they never went to the nearby township wearing their wrist bands because they were too shy to show that they were miners. But this has all changed.

We have shown what we can do and are fighting for our rights, said a shaft steward from Vaal Reefs Gold Mine.

Although wages remain the main focus, the issue also includes miners' rights, job security, and health and safety issues on the union's agenda.

In the mines, health and safety is a major concern. Many workers have got to be alive or unharmed to earn wages. Therefore for us health and safety comes first, said NUM's general secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa.

The NUM has also launched a determined campaign to rid the industry of job reservation which has proved to be a mine apart — its low wages, bad working conditions, as well as racket and white banalco.

Although, the Chamber of Mines has refused to allow the union to be party to negotiations on the removal of job reservation, the struggle on the ground by workers has not stopped.

More than 17,000 miners were dismissed at Vaal Reefs Gold Mine and the Randfontein East Gold Mine when they started "charging up" — a task reserved for white miners.

We have to fight all the way to stop the work of white miners although we never received the wages of a dismissed worker.

Although the union suffered a major set back with the dismissals it did not destroy the spirit of the workers. All it did was to strengthen management's determination to protect white miners and stop the growing power of the NUM.

In the many strikes disputes, the miners have won a significant victory. The NUM used union bashing and wage and scale repression to get their point across. However, Vaal Reefs and Randfontein East Gold Mines have not yet capitulated.

They suffered badly at the hands of police and mining security in the area. They were left without safe working conditions.

Forty-six thousand gold miners have died since the turn of the century. Six hundred die each year in occupational accidents in South Africa's gold mines. Clearly the blame for the present unsafe conditions lie at the door of the mining bosses.

The NUM has committed itself to fight for democratic rights at the level of the industry. NUM has drawn up a Bill of Rights. Its major demands include the recognition of democratic rights, the right to refuse to work under conditions which are hazardous, the right to safety training, the right to form a union, the right to participate in the planning of mining operations.

The NUM is only when the Mineworkers Bill of Rights is recognised in practice that the NUM can say we are on the way towards underground gold mining," said Cyril Ramaphosa.
This is the last part of a series written especially for students which looked at why trade unions were formed by workers. Workers found out that by joining together they could fight against the capitalists' desire to suck more and more profit from them. In this section we look at the different forms of trade unions and why the principle of workers control is so important to the independent unions in South Africa. In future issues of FOSATU Workers News we will be looking at the history of education. Students, if you have any poems, letters, or drawings you want to be included in this space, write to The Editor, P.O. Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014.

Only workers can directly challenge the capitalists.

In the 1960s Century, workers in the cotton mills (above) used to work for up to 16 hours a day. In other words, besides the capitalist class, the working class is the only group of people who have any economic power in a capitalist society.

The workers' struggle against exploitation by the capitalists has been a long one. Many gains have been made. However, throughout the world workers have struggled to try and shorten the number of hours that they work every day. In England for example, in the early days of capitalism and the factory system, women and children worked in factories for up to 16 hours a day. There were great struggles by workers to reduce the time. In the 1840s the government passed a law which said that workers could only work for 10 hours a day. It was not until the early 1990s that the working day was reduced to 8 hours. In many countries workers still work for over eight hours a day. In South Africa workers put forward a demand on May Day this year for a forty hour week (an eight hour day). In Germany workers had a massive campaign in 1984 for a 30 hour week.

Democratic unions prepare workers for their role in a future society.

The shortening of the working week has not been the only area where workers have made great strides. The right to form and join trade unions, the right to decent working conditions, and the right to better wages were all gains made by workers. Capitalists did not provide these rights out of kindness of their hearts— they had to be fought for by workers. Battles around retribution, the unfair dismissal of workers, sexual harassment and maternity rights are still being fought by trade unions.

However, trade unions haven't only been concerned with the conditions of their membership on the shop floor of the factory. For example in 1964, FOSATU sent representatives from door to door in the townships to encourage people not to vote under the new constitution. And in many areas where white-dominated townships, trade union councils have been active in discussing and acting upon workers' needs.

The trade union movement can be an important tool for workers to develop their political consciousness.

Unify gives workers the power to fight for better conditions.

Industrial unionism is important because it allows workers to elect their leaders in the factory. These leaders can then take on the employers and negotiate for the workers with the bosses. The shop stewards' job is to look after the workers and negotiate for the workers with the bosses. The shop stewards can do this because they are elected by the workers. If the workers don't want the shop stewards to represent their interests, then the workers can remove him or her. If the workers don't want the shop stewards to represent their interests, then the workers can remove him or her. In this way, shop stewards are accountable to the workers that have elected them. Most industrial unions encourage the participation of their members in the day to day running of the union. This is to make sure that the leaders of the union don't simply take decisions on their own. They must be controlled by the members. This is why democracy is so important in these trade unions. The role of the shop steward is very important in the trade union's democracy.

Why have the workers organized themselves in this way in the factory? One of the biggest reasons is that they know how powerful the capitalist bosses are. The workers know that by acting on their own or in small groups they have very little power. Bosses can easily fire small numbers of workers if they try and fight for better working conditions. This is why democracy is so important in a workers' organization. It means that as many people as possible are involved in discussing which issues should be taken up, and how they should be acted upon. In this way the trade unions in the factory ensure majority support for any decision taken.

It is very important to understand how workers have organized themselves against the bosses in the factories. This is because in a capitalist society power is held by the capitalist class and the government. For workers to resist this power and to have any say in the way in which things are produced and the way in which the society is governed, they must have control of their own lives.

The power of the workers comes from the fact that it is the workers who operate the machines. The workers dig for gold, make the shoes, drive the buses, work in the iron foundries and build the roads. They produce the goods from which the capitalists make the profits. Because of this, the workers are the only people in society who can directly challenge the position of the bosses. The capitalist bosses need the workers. Without them there would be no money to be paid in wages or house to live in. In other words, besides the capitalist class, the working class is the only group of people who have any economic power in a capitalist society.

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Sharpeville: March 21 1960

In 1960 before that terrible day of March 21 some workers resigned from work because they were preparing for that day. In March that campaign became very hot. Everywhere people wore stickers on their jackets saying “Away With Passes”. If they offered you one of these stickers and you didn’t take it you were labelled a sellout. Even people sitting in the shebeens had these stickers. Workers also wore them inside the factory.

It was the strongest campaign I’ve ever seen. Sometimes you saw people standing at the bus-stops asking people to burn their passes, because the idea was that people should surrender themselves at the nearest police station on March 21 without their passes. Some people started small fires at the bus-stops and everybody would take out their passes and burn them.

On the weekend before the 21st, we had parties — stockets — drinking and having campaign workers there supplying us with those stickers, and we talked about meeting to be held. They told us to go to work on Monday and to surrender ourselves at the police station.

This was a very hot thing. Everybody was prepared. I was doing night-shift that week. We knocked off Saturday morning. That Saturday we were in the shebeens discussing this thing.

’We only wanted to talk but the police beat us up’

On Sunday I don’t know when I fell asleep but I was woken by people shouting outside. My mother came and said people were knocking on doors and came through the windows. I peeked through the window and they shouted, they pulled me out to join them. They searched the house — they didn’t want anyone to remain inside. There were a lot of people in the streets.

Then someone shouted, ‘They are coming!’ and behind us there was a lot of jeeps that were infamous during that time. The police were armed with machine guns and rioters. They also had big tanks. The local municipal police together tried to disperse us. But they couldn’t. I think they were confused and some of the people said, ‘No’, we told them, ‘we didn’t want to fight, we only wanted to talk’. But the police beat us up, chasing people who ran in all directions.

The next morning I woke up at five o’clock because I was on day shift and had to board the six o’clock bus to work. I found that there were no buses. People were busy preaching that today we would not go to work. A big crowd gathered at the bus-stop. People were making sure that no one would work that day.

We went to the Sharpeville police station. When we got into the station yard the police locked the gates. The leader went to talk to the police. He told them that we had come to offer ourselves for arrest for not having passes. He reported to us that the police were still waiting for instructions from their seniors. The people started singing and surrounded the police station. The people were excited but not angry; women and children were also there.

The police blocked the main street and would not allow people to use the big street. Even the vehicles were blocked. We were only on the western, northern and eastern sides of the police station. The southern was controlled by the police. The black policemen were carrying sten guns. The white policemen had bayonets and sjamboks.

Some time later we saw aeroplanes in the sky. They attracted the people and made the crowd grow. Then we saw the slaughter coming from the southwestern part of Sharpeville. The aeroplanes were flying very low. The people were throwing their hats to the aeroplanes. They thought the aeroplanes were playing with them. They didn’t realise that death was near.

Some people were standing at the western gate of the police station. Police asked them to make way for the aeroplanes. A plainclothes policeman was driving a grey car. He took cool drinks from the boot and gave them to the policemen. They were chatting amongst themselves while we were busy singing.

I don’t know what caused the police to shoot. But immediately after the plainclothes policeman went back to his colleague the shooting began. We heard only one sound and couldn’t see anything standing next to the yard. People fell on their backs, sides and stomachs. People were lying all over.

Both on the eastern and western sides people were trying to run away.

‘Only when they saw the blood did they see that the police meant business’

Fortunately for me they could not shoot on the side where I was standing. That is how I managed to get away.

People were running in all directions in the townships. Some couldn’t believe that people had been shot, they thought that they had heard firecrackers. Only when they saw the blood and dead bodies did they realize that the police meant business.

There were ambulances from all over as far as Baragwanath and trucks were taking the people who had been shot dead. They were busy loading the corpses onto the trucks. These were seen by people at the Vereeniging Hospital and Baragwanath under police escort.

People started crying. Some were asking what had happened. Others were looking for their relatives. Nobody wanted to work on the second day. They couldn’t work without knowing where their relatives were. Whether they had been killed or injured.

Many managed to escape with bullet wounds. But when they went to Vereeniging Hospital they were arrested immediately. The leaders of the pass campaign were all arrested; the police knew them all. It was a terrible day in the shooting. Ordinary people got hurt and killed.

’My Life Struggle’ is available from the FOSATU Printing Unit, PO Box 1810, Dobligomo 4014 or from Raven Press, PO Box 31134, Johannesburg 2017. Normal price R5, Workers price R3.50.

As seen by Petrus Tom

Petrus Tom outside the African Cables factory where he used to work.