



A trumpet player adds his own brand of entertainment to the Durban May Day celebrations



Singing workers arrive at the Maritzburg rally



Rocklands Civic Centre packed to capacity on May 1

IN the biggest May Day celebrations this country has ever seen, over 20 000 workers nationwide have pledged to win May 1 (Workers Day) as a paid public holiday.

Workers flocked to meetings held in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, Estcourt, Secunda, Mamelodi, Johannesburg and on the East Rand.

The South African working class has come a long way since the first May Day celebrations in 1904.

In those early days only white workers, organised in trade unions and some small socialist parties, held meetings.

Now, May Day is ignored by the white right-wing trade unions. It has been left to the independent non-racial trade unions to remind all workers of the great tradition of International Labour Day (May Day).

May Day has always been a day to remember that workers do not struggle alone. This is why unity figured so prominently in many May Day speeches.

The South African working class is beginning to unite. Soon a trade union federation will be formed, the likes of which has never before been seen in this country's labour history.

The workers' struggle, though, is not only limited to South Africa. May Day is also a day for workers worldwide to remember their common struggles.

The May Day tradition

began with workers in America demanding an eight-hour day.

Workers in South Africa are now calling for an eight-hour day (40-hour week) and in many of the May Day meetings this was raised as a demand.

In Britain and Europe, workers are also fighting for a shorter working week — in Germany it is for a 35-hour week. They also believe that shorter working hours will create more jobs and hold-off the common enemy of unemployment.

Workers throughout the world are fighting the same battle — for a better society for workers. To echo the slogan which appeared on many May Day banners, 'Workers of the World Unite'.

THE union so powerful, the union so powerful... sang a group of dancing jubilant women as still more people streamed into the Rocklands Civic Centre in Mitchell's Plain.

It was May Day and here in Cape Town workers had come from as far away as Malmesbury and Tulbagh to join in the celebration.

The crowds eventually swelled to about 3 000, making it one of the biggest worker meetings Cape Town has seen.

The meeting was organised by the seven unions in the Western Cape which are part of the planned new federation of unions.

The meeting was very different from the one held last year. Worker songs and shouts of 'Amandla' punctuated the speeches and there was dancing in the crowded aisles.

Workers from the General Workers Union put on a play showing the differences between organisation and individual struggle.

In countless songs, workers said they were there to celebrate, commemorate and commit themselves to ongoing struggle.

Against a vibrant backdrop of union banners, John Ernstzen of the 11 400-strong Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA) told people he was proud to be standing there.

'I feel proud because I'm a worker and involved in the workers' struggle. Not that it's nice to be a worker,' he added, 'it is hard. But I'm proud because workers in South Africa have decided to get up and fight.'

'1985 is an important year because thousands of workers have decided to finish with waiting. History has taught us that nobody can better the workers' lot, only workers can do this.'

He pointed out the difference between May Day and other special days, Christmas, for example. 'People say Christmas is a day of forgetting and forgiving. For us, May Day is not a day of forgetting, but of remembrance.'

'We cannot forget what happened in Uitenhage, Craddock and Crossroads. To the people of these areas

we say: your struggle is ours. To the ruling class we say: the children shot in Langa and Crossroads are not just children of Langa and Crossroads, they are all our children.'

'You cannot divide us anymore. We have built unity. If you touch one worker you touch us all.'

He urged workers to strengthen their unions and build the new federation so that they could strengthen their struggle.

'The federation is not a pretty ornament. It is not there for show. It is a vehicle to transport us to victory. If a union is like a car, the federation is like a plane.'

But May Day was not just a celebration. It was also a time to pay tribute to those who had died for the workers' struggle.

'Who can forget Neil Aggett and others who have fallen?' he asked. 'The only way to pay tribute to them is to continue to fight.'

May Day was also a time of commitment. Some of the things workers in South Africa were struggling for had been won long ago by workers in other countries.

'About 100 years ago, workers in America fought for an eight-hour working day. Why do some of us still have to work 24 hours? We must fight for shorter working hours so that we can spend time with our families.'

Other things he said ought to be fought for were: ● May Day as a public holiday.

● the right to organise freely and picket in support of demands.

● decent housing and schooling.

● an end to pass laws, homelands and colour discrimination.

'Part of our long term struggle, comrades, is to fight for a new society where there will be no exploitation and poverty.' He said the struggle was for workers to control their own destiny.

'Why is it that workers produce the wealth of the country but can't have a say in what happens to that wealth?' he said.

● NE union, one industry... was the May Day message from Port Elizabeth as over 1 000 workers gathered in a local church hall.

The unity unions, which organised the May Day rally, had serious difficulties getting a venue as the Director of Housing, Eddie Samuels, refused to allow the workers to use the Gelvendale Community Centre main hall even though the hall was available.

However, the rally went ahead.

In keeping with the principle of 'One union, one industry', which is one of the conditions of the new federation, there were speakers from each of the different industrial sectors — chemical, commercial and service, transport, food and metal.

They spoke on the mean-

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Who's the aggressor? Armed police prevent workers leaving the Johannesburg May Day meeting

ing of May Day, woman's rights, worker control, worker unity and the new federation, trade unions and the struggle in the community and, finally, workers' and students' task in the working class struggle.

Numerous resolutions were adopted at the PE rally including support for the Brazilian workers' struggle for collective bargaining rights at the Firestone factory in Sao Paulo.

At the rally, workers pledged to campaign for an end to oppression and exploitation and 'that apartheid, the poison in South African society, be scrapped and the practice thereof be made an offence and illegal'.

Other campaign demands were: that a reasonable maternity leave be granted on full pay; that workers be paid a living wage as determined by the needs of workers; and that unemployed workers be paid reasonable unemployment benefits for as long as they are unemployed.

WORKERS should have their own leaders and those leaders must be the workers themselves. It is only then that the workers' struggle shall prosper, said Maxwell Xulu, Metal and Allied Workers Union vice-president.

He was speaking to the 5 000-strong crowd who gathered to celebrate May Day at Currie's Fountain in Durban.

'Can I refer to the differ-

ences between a class struggle and a popular struggle? Brother Xulu continued.

'You find that in the popular struggle you will get leaders who you cannot be very sure who elected them.'

'But if you talk about the shop stewards who are worker leaders, definitely every shop steward who is here knows who elected him and who he is responsible to.'

Brother Xulu said that unfortunately in South Africa employers were commonly known to be white.

'And the reason we cannot think of it any other way is because we are directed to look at racism rather than the class struggle.'

He said workers were told by various popular leaders that 'we are with you in the struggle' and 'you must fight for worker rights'.

'But, some of the very same leaders of certain struggles for the liberation of workers are black employers and I am sure that none of the workers here today are employees of black employers. Because black employers will never allow them to come to May Day.'

'So, I cannot see how they can lead me into liberation when they have not even liberated their own employees,' Brother Xulu said.

'The best negotiator for a worker or the best leader for a worker will be one of the workers,' he concluded.

The May Day celebrations in Durban got off to an early start.

Although, the rally was

only meant to officially begin at 1 pm, workers at a number of factories decided to declare May Day as a public holiday and started streaming in to the stadium from about eight that morning.

A banner along the back of the main stand warned 'Employers and government beware! Workers are going to crush you'.

Early in the afternoon when the crowd had swelled to about 5 000, workers marched singing around the football pitch.

Then, the events got underway. These included worker plays, workers reciting their poetry, choirs, a group of young gum boot dancers and the popular singing and dancing group 'Abafana Bomoya'.

In Natal May Day meetings were also held at Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith and Estcourt.

About 3 000 workers at Maritzburg heard Sister Mkhize, chairperson of the Prestige shop stewards committee, suggest that workers could only overcome factory and community problems if they united as FOSATU 'both in the factories and outside'.

She said that workers must organise themselves so that they were represented at all levels of society.

Workers must create and use their own platforms but they must also protect their platforms from people who wanted to use worker power for their own ends, Sister Mkhize added.

SINGING and chanting workers leaving a lunchtime May Day meeting held at Khotso House in the centre of Johannesburg were confronted by riot police armed with guns and batons.

The police, who had cordoned off the area using dogs, forced the workers back into the building and then allowed only a few to leave at a time.

About 500 workers attended the meeting which was addressed by speakers from CCAWUSA, FOSATU, AZACTU and the UDF unions.

All spoke of the need for unity. One speaker condemned capitalism as the root cause of workers' misery.

Jethro Dlalisa, regional chairman of the Transport and General Workers Union, read out the aims of the worker movement. These were:

- to secure economic and social justice for all workers.
- to strive for the building of a united working class regardless of race, sex or creed.
- to encourage all workers to join trade unions and to develop solidarity among all workers.
- to secure just standards of living, social security, and fair conditions of work for the working class as a whole.
- to encourage the education and training of all workers so as to further the interests of the working class.

● to change, advance or oppose any law, action or policy of the government or any other grouping in the interests of the working class.

At Morena Stores at Katlehong about 500 workers mainly from PG Glass heard shop stewards Ronald Mofokeng and Baznaar Moloi speak about the origins of May Day. This was followed by a braai and a film.

Under the banner 'Workers of the World Unite. Solidarity in Action' about 2 000 workers from Sasol packed into the township hall at Secunda.

This was the biggest meeting held at Secunda since the November stay-away where 6 000 workers were sacked.

Hundreds of disappointed Sasol miners were unable to attend the meeting because of the lack of transport.

Chemical Workers Industrial Union organisers and FOSATU president Chris Dlamini spoke and in between the Kelloggs choir (nicknamed the K Team) and a CWIU choir sang.

At the weekend more May Day meetings were held in various townships in the Transvaal — these were at Sebokeng, Katlehong, Regina Mundi, Mamelodi and Brits.

At the Brits meeting, which was organised by the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union, workers called for: the improvement of social benefits like UIF and pensions; an improvement in wages; and for a shorter working week.