



Chemical union's tenth anniversary

THE Chemical Workers Industrial Union celebrated its 10-year anniversary at the union's first national Annual General Meeting held at Secunda near the Sasol plants. Over 3 000 workers, some from as far as Port Elizabeth and Durban, attended the meeting. Guest speaker, Muzi Buthelezi, the regional secretary of FOSATU's Northern Natal region spoke on the difficulties unions were experiencing in the homelands. Workers at the meeting also discussed the present unity talks in detail and pledged themselves to the formation of a wider trade union federation.

Years without unions

THE Piet Retief area in the southern Transvaal has not seen unions since the days of the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) in the 1920's.

Now the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union is growing in the area.

About a year ago, workers at Mondi were the first to approach PWAU. They were soon followed by other factories.

PWAU now has majority support in four factories — Mondi, Bisonbord, HC & H, and Charka.

In order to co-ordinate activities in the area a Shop Stewards Council was formed in August.

As the centre for timber and forestry in South Africa, the Piet Retief area holds tremendous potential for the union.

At present about 800 workers have joined PWAU, with more factories wanting to join.

A PWAU organiser said it was 'hardly surprising' that workers wanted to join the union as 'conditions are terrible'.

'Many workers earn less than 35c per hour and with that miserable wage they are still expected to buy their own overalls and safety boots,' he said.

'Also, workers often don't receive compensation for accidents at work,' he added.

The union organiser said many workers lived in conditions 'close to slavery'.

'Even the Security Police are following developments closely and have questioned workers and union organisers,' he said.

He added that the struggle to win union rights and better conditions in the Piet Retief area was likely to be 'a long and difficult one'.

Congratulations!

FOSATU would just like to congratulate PW Botha on his receiving R300 000 severance pay when he switched jobs from Prime Minister to President.

The federation's members are pleased to hear that their tax money is being well spent.

FOSATU hopes that employers will bear in mind this precedent (or is it President?) in future retrenchment negotiations.

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Is the canteen open to all races...or not?

A FOSATU union recently had great difficulty in finding out from a particular multinational company whether their canteen was open to all races.

The company shall remain nameless in order to prevent any embarrassment — here is how the conversation around the negotiating table went:

Union: Can you tell us whether your canteen is segregated on racial grounds.

Management: No, it is segregated on the basis of production workers and office workers. You cannot expect a lady with a clean white dress to sit on the same chair as a worker with a dirty overall.

Union: Oh, that means that a white foreman is not entitled to eat in the staff canteen because he works in the factory.

Management: No, not entirely, the foreman is entitled to eat there.

Union: Well, does that mean that the black personnel officer who is an office worker is entitled to eat in the staff canteen.

Management: Not exactly, he would not be entitled to eat there.

Union: Well, if the white fore-

man, who is a factory worker, is entitled to eat in the staff canteen, but the black personnel officer, who is an office worker, is not, can you explain to us on what basis the canteen is segregated.

Management: Well.....

Union: We want you to understand that we are not really concerned so much about issues such as desegregating toilets and canteens, although in principle these are important issues which we are surprised a multinational company subscribing to the EEC Code has not put right. What we are really concerned about is whether workers will be treated and promoted on merit.

Management: Oh, there can be no doubt about that. Look at these people here (pointing to three black foreman who were present at the meeting as management representatives). A little while ago these jobs were filled by whites. Now blacks have been promoted into these fairly senior positions.

Union: Do you mean they can go into the staff canteen?

Management: No, not exactly.....

Paid May Day won

FOR the first time in many years, workers at a South African factory will be able to celebrate May Day — with the support of their management.

In the past May 1 (May Day) was even recognised as a public holiday in a number of industrial council agreements.

But in the early 1960's when the government cracked down on worker organisations, May Day was removed from council agreements.

However, worker pressure has started again for the recognition of May Day as a workers' public holiday.

In May this year, the independent unions held mass rallies and in Natal a May Day campaign was launched.

Since then May Day has been raised as a demand in factory negotiations and also by FOSATU unions participating in industrial council talks.

Pikington Glass, in the Eastern Cape, is the first factory to set aside May Day as a paid public holiday.

This follows wage talks between the company and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union where it was raised as a demand.

Visas turned down

TWO top officials from the Canadian Labour Congress — Canada's giant trade union federation — have been refused visas to visit South Africa.

Rick Jackson and Paul Purritt from the CLC's international department were due to visit unions in South Africa, including FOSATU, towards the middle of November.

But days before their visit was to have begun, they were sudd-

enly informed by the South African government that their applications for visas had been turned down.

The turning down of their visit, Paul Purritt told FOSATU Worker News, would be regarded in Canada as an insult to the entire Canadian trade union movement.

A FOSATU delegation recently visited Canada as guests of the CLC.

Normans Transport victory for TGWU

THE Transport and General Workers Union recently won a landslide victory over the TUCSA affiliated African Transport Workers Union in a secret ballot at Normans Transport.

In the ballot, which was held in order to prove which union had the majority support, 109 workers voted for TGWU and only four in favour of the TUCSA union.

Transvaal organiser, Mam' Lydia Kompe said the union had been organising Normans Transport workers for the past eighteen months.

'We started with workers at the small Pretoria depot and then moved on to the Wadeville head office,' she said.

'But when we asked for recognition, the company just refused saying that their workers belonged to the African Transport union,' she added.

Mam' Lydia said the company had an informal closed shop with ATWU 'just because it is the only African union on the industrial council'.

She said the first time the workers had ever seen anything of the TUCSA union was when they arrived at the ballot.

'They just knew that RI was being deducted from their wages everytime,' she added.

Mam' Lydia said all the workers had then resigned from the TUCSA union because they said 'it was not a good union for them'.

But, in the middle of the

union's recruiting campaign, management fired a key union member because he had been seen talking to TGWU organisers.

The union immediately protested and launched an unfair labour practice case against Normans Transport.

In a settlement reached out-of-court, the company agreed to take back the sacked union member and to begin recognition negotiations.

Mam' Lydia said the union had submitted a preliminary agreement 'but after two weeks Mr Norman himself phoned and said he was not too happy about our representivity'.

She said TGWU had agreed to hold a secret ballot to prove 'once and for all' that it was supported by the majority of the workers.

'On the day of the ballot eight officials from ATWU including the general secretary were there at the factory and were given a chance to talk to the workers,' she said.

'All the workers pitched up wearing union T shirts and they wanted to have the TGWU supporters to stand on one side and ATWU supporters to stand on the other.'

'But we persuaded them to go on with the secret ballot and we won,' Mam' Lydia said.

However, she added, in spite of the results of the ballot management seem to be 'stalling' their recognition of the union.

Dunlop worker wins History Workshop prize for his writing



DUNLOP worker, Alfred Qabula, recently won a R50 prize awarded by Wits University's History Workshop for an auto-biography he is writing. Brother Qabula, who has become well known in FOSATU because of his performance of his Praise Poem, sent in part of his auto-biography to the History Workshop's history writing competition. The auto-biography, which is not yet completed, covers Brother Qabula's experience as a worker both in the Transvaal and in Natal. It also describes the union struggles at Dunlop where he now works. Earlier this year in FOSATU Worker News we carried a section from the auto-biography in which he described looking for a job at a construction site in the Transvaal. Brother Qabula, together with another worker and two union organisers, has just completed an amusing play describing the experience of migrant workers. It had its first performance at a Dunlop strike meeting. Next year in FOSATU Worker News we will carry scenes from this play.