

VICTORY FOR S.A.R. WORKERS

Last Monday, 22nd April, the thirteen workers who had been suspended for a week by the S.A.R. officials in Pietermaritzburg because of their refusal to work overtime, were re-employed. The reason they refused was because of the transport problem. Because the bus fares were about R13 per month the workers had to walk from Mkondeni to Mbali, a distance of about 13 kms. The railways were asked to supply subsidized transport, which was promised when the market moved to Mkondeni. This was never granted.

The terms of their agreement to going back was the granting of the long-awaited subsidized bus fare. The workers now pay 8c for the bus fare from Mbali to the station, and from the station to the market the S.A.R. provides transport at 56c per month. The total spent on transport thus works out at about R4,40 per month contrasted with the incredibly high cost of R13 before.

The importance of this agreement is that it illustrates what can be achieved through negotiation. It is a pity that pressures such as newspapers and attacks by M.Ps was also necessary to clearing up the problem. These would not be necessary if an effective democratically elected Union existed which could function as a safeguard for workers' rights while maintaining open the interests of the management through a system of open communication.

An organisation should not fragment into an employer - employee clash but should function as a whole system. Unions attempt to achieve this unity while maintaining harmony.

BUSES - THE MONEY YOU SPEND

At a meeting held in Pietermaritzburg on Saturday 28th April, an Action Committee of the Indian Ratepayers Association, members of the Metal & Allied Workers' Union and various African and Coloured representatives, protest was made about the recent bus fare increases PMB Corporation from 6c to 10c. Mr N. Middleton pointed out that the black commuter routes which were used more frequently, were being used to subsidize the lesser used white commuter routes.

The Union is vitally concerned with this problem. In Howick for instance the Mphendle Bus Service raised its fares on the Howick-Montrose route from 10c to 15c each way. This is a distance of 8 miles. As the Union has many members working at SARMCOL, the largest factory in Howick, they were concerned with this added hardship for the worker. Legal advice was sought but in the meantime women at Montrose location gathered outside the offices of the Superintendent of Montrose Township to protest against the increase. The Union is not clear on the position as yet. Rumour circulating is that the fares will rise but that a system of coupons would come into use. In this case the Union will recommend to the management of SARMCOL that it subsidizes its workers transport costs. Thus the Union shows that it can help the problems of the workers but the women at Montrose have shown their effectiveness by their protest.