

to talk about it, but nothing has yet come of it', said the union official.

The women of Mbekweni, the township outside Paarl, who were recently retrenched from one of the Langeberg factories, face a double obstacle in finding work in the Western Cape. Apart from the serious job shortage in the industry, the coloured labour preference policy imposes quotas on the number of African women employed in various industries. Textiles and canning are the only factories that will employ African women in the area. Like the Wellington workers, they too, are not entitled to unemployment benefits.

While canning employers complain of the collapse of the export market, and the entry of Greece into the EEC, which precipitated the crisis, thousands of workers sit in tiny houses all over the Western Cape, literally not knowing where their next meal is coming from.

(Western Cape correspondent, March '83)

Detentions Hit Unions

The East London branch of SAAWU (South African Allied Workers' Union) has been the main target of a recent wave of detentions. Early on the morning of Wednesday 16th March six trade unionists were taken from Mdantsane township by police attached to the Ciskei 'homeland'.

Those detained are:

- Thozamile Gqweta — SAAWU national president
- Sisa Njikelana — SAAWU vice-president
- Bangumzi Sifingo — vice-chairman, Chloride workers committee
- Jeff Wabena — SAAWU organiser
- Humphrey Maxagwana - SAAWU organiser
- Sidney Mufamadi — general-secretary of GAWU

All except one are East London-based unionists. Mufamadi was visiting East London at the time of his detention. He is employed by the Johannesburg-based General and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU).

In a statement issued after the detentions SAAWU stated that it 'vehemently deplores this barbaric action. The detentions are clearly indicative of the intention to destroy SAAWU. Nevertheless all their attempts are an exercise in futility because nothing is going to deter us in

the quest of fighting for the most exploited and downtrodden workers in society. We call on all progressive bodies to condemn these unjustifiable detentions'.

Support committees have been established in various regions, partly in response to these detentions. A meeting of Johannesburg unionist condemned the Ciskei 'government' for 'perpetrating their masters' ends and objectives to crush and cripple the emerging independent trade unions in South Africa'.

A number of those detained have been held for lengthy periods previously. In particular, Gqweta has been detained eight times and Njikelana six, either by the South African or Ciskeian police. Despite having been charged on numerous occasions neither has been convicted, since the charges were withdrawn.

The Sebe brothers, who run the Ciskei, have stated that the six detainees would be charged together with three others for ANC activities. This allegation should, however, be treated cautiously since similar allegations have been made previously by them.

The Ciskei authorities' hostility to trade unionism is long-standing and this, together with South African police action, has made trade unionism in the East London area a hazardous enterprise. Recently Charles Nqakula, the national president of MWASA (Media Workers' Association of SA), had his news agency raided. Mr Nqakula is restricted to the Ciskei and may not enter the rest of South Africa.

This week, Bonisile Norushe, the East London-based national organiser of AFCWU (African Food and Canning Workers' Union), has had his home raided by Ciskei Security Police four times in as many days. Fortunately Mr Norushe was away on union business. As a precautionary measure he has decided not to return to his Mdantsane (Ciskei) home for the time being. In a statement his union claimed there was 'a concerted attempt to crush unions in the homelands and so create a reservoir of cheap labour there'.

This month has also seen the harassment by security police of members of the General Workers' Union's (GWU) branch in East London.

Police action in the past has not managed to stop the continuation and even growth of trade unionism in the East London area. There is no reason to suppose that the current wave of detentions and harassment will succeed in stopping the trade union movement.

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- Latest — All the detainees were released on March 30th. No charges were brought against them.