

ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Two trade unionists have been arrested during the last three weeks for holding illegal meetings outside factories.

Skakes Sikakhane, General Secretary of the Food and Beverage Workers' Union (a Council of Unions of South Africa affiliate) was arrested outside Chubby Chicks, a poultry processing factory in Potchefstroom, on the 23rd of February. He was held for one day and then released on bail, but not before having his passport confiscated and being restricted to the Johannesburg Municipality (thereby preventing him from assisting workers at Chubby Chicks).

Jeremy Baskin, an organiser for the Paper Wood and Allied Workers' Union, was arrested outside Transpoly, a factory making plastic bags, in Amalgam (an industrial area near Johannesburg) on the 12th of March. After being escorted by security police to John Voster Square Baskin was detained until 6:00am the same day and then released on bail.

Both unionists were charged under Section 46 of the Internal Security Act, a measure which recently replaced the Riotous Assemblies Act. Under the new law a magistrate may prohibit all meetings in a magisterial area which do not take place "within the walls of a building". Recently an organiser and a worker, both members of the National Union of Mineworkers (an affiliate of Cusa), were acquitted on a charge under this law, arising out of a meeting held at the Vaal Reefs mine in March last year.

In another incident Robert Mkhize, an organiser for the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa, was asked to report to a police station following a dispute at the Landdrost Hotel

briefing

in Johannesburg. He was arrested on arrival and released on bail the next day, the 7th of March, having been charged under the Intimidation Act. In protest at what they felt was police intimidation of their union the workers at the Landdrost downed tools immediately. This is not the first time this has happened to the union. Five Ccawusa organisers were arrested under the Intimidation Act last year. Only one of the five was subsequently sentenced, and this case has gone to appeal.

The involvement of the police in routine union activities of this nature is seen by unionists as a disturbing trend. In the cases cited this year there are strong indications that managements were responsible for calling the police. If this continues it could mean a reversion to a system whereby disputes between management and workers are resolved by police intimidation rather than negotiation.

This method of dealing with workers' grievances may appeal to smaller and economically more fragile enterprises. Although it is too soon to identify a pattern in the recent arrests, it is notable that the companies involved are of a type which have in the past relied on low wages and a transient workforce to maintain profitability.

Arrests and detentions of unionists, workers, people working in community and political organisations and others have increased sharply since 1982. Statistics released by the South African Institute of Race Relations show that the number of identified detentions in South Africa increased from 264 in 1982 to 453 in 1983. These figures undoubtedly underestimate the numbers involved as by no means all cases are reported. The occupations of the people detained are shown in the table below:

* SAIRR Fact Paper on Detentions RD 1/84, 8/3/84

DETENTIONS IN 1982 AND 1983

	1982	1984
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Students and teachers	117	140
Unionists and workers	30	65
Community/Political workers	17	44
Churchmen	11	8
Journalists	5	8
Occupations unknown	84	188
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	264	453

Certain features of the detentions are notable. The increase between 1982 and 1983 is largely attributable to detentions in the bantustans: Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei, which accounted for 83 detentions in 1982 and 215 in 1983. Seventy percent of the people detained in 1983 were released without being charged and 20% were charged for a variety of offences under the security legislation. The remainder continued to be held in detention.

During the last twelve months three people are known to have died in detention.

(Johannesburg Correspondent, 22 March, 1984)