

"Ford tries to force racial split in factory"

PORT ELIZABETH — After a 17-day strike workers who were led by management to believe they could return to work on Monday, June 8, arrived at two of Ford's plants — only to be turned away.

Officials of the Motor and Component Workers Union of South Africa (Macwusa) claim that Ford management had deliberately allowed the "misunderstanding" to develop.

Bypassing the union, Ford management had issued slips to some workers on Friday informing them that the engine plant would re-open on Monday, the Cortina plant on Thursday, and the Neave plant on the following Monday.

So while the engine plant opened on Monday, workers arriving at the other two plants were confronted with closed gates and were told to return at the new times.

At a meeting that morning the workers decided to accept Ford management's conditions for returning.

But all was not well on the engine plant front. The workers there were told they would be expected to teach a "coloured" employee his job. If a black worker was fired for refusing to do so, the rest would walk out.

The night-shift workers attended this meeting immediately after reporting for duty.

On Tuesday, 9 June, one of the ex-strikers refused to instruct a new employee and was promptly fired. He allegedly refused to accept his dismissal, and also refused to leave the plant or return his overall.

Security personnel were called to take his overall and remove him from the plant. A scuffle broke out, and when workers rushed to assist their colleague one of the security guards allegedly drew a revolver

and held it to the fired worker's head.

Then the 500 engine-plant workers gathered in front of the plant and were told by management representative to return to work or leave.

Ford released a statement saying that the new employees had been recruited to operate a proposed double night shift at the plant.

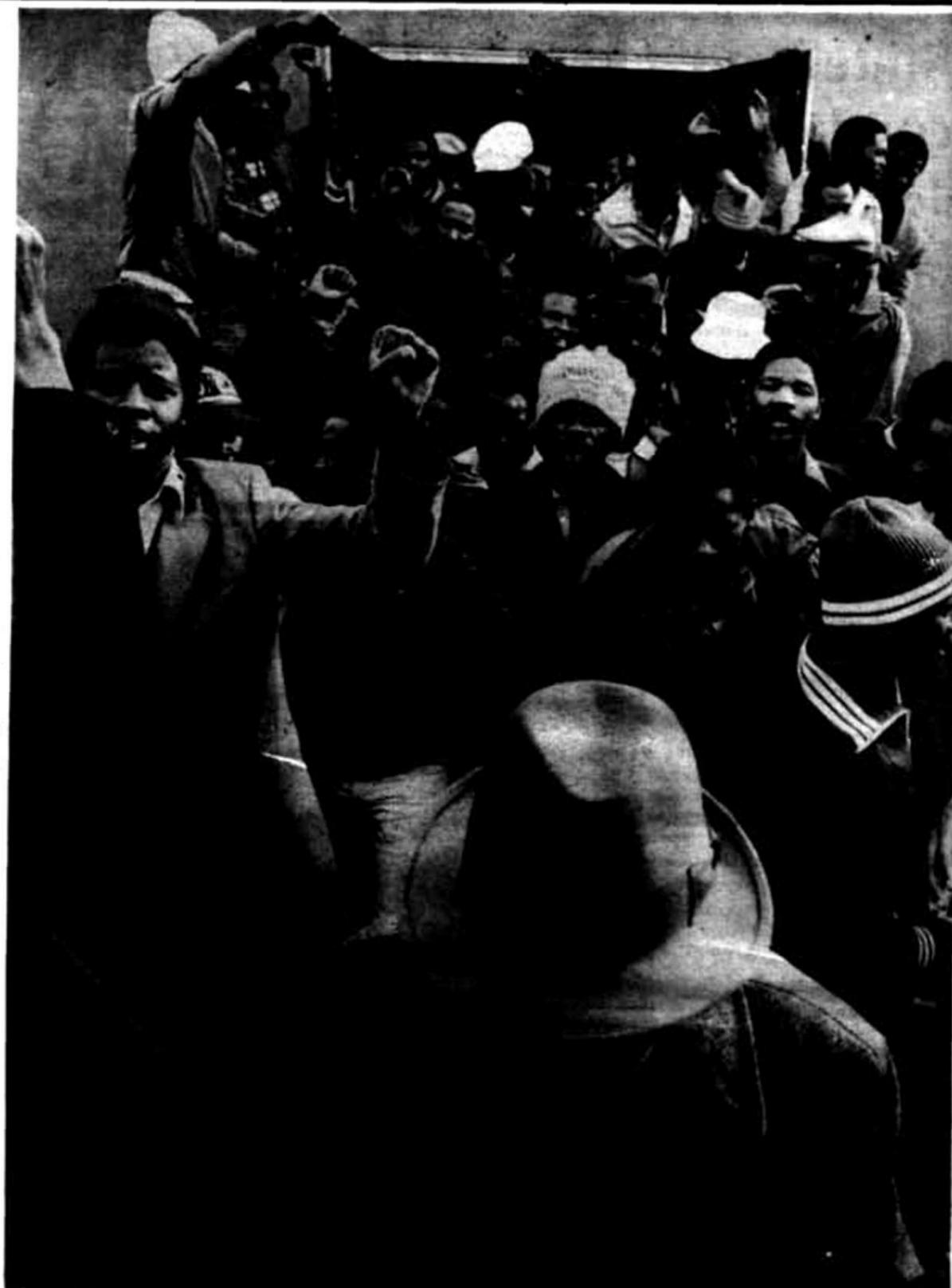
Macwusa leadership held a meeting with Ford management on Tuesday afternoon, at which the organising secretary, Government Zini, and the general secretary, Dennis Neer, were informed that they were being removed from Ford's salaried pay roll and would become hourly-paid workers with immediate effect.

At this meeting Macwusa understood that the workers would be able to return to the engine plant the following day. An agreement with management that Macwusa would give the company a day's notice before the return of striking workers, was not seen by the union as referring to what they had regarded as a "temporary disruption".

At a meeting that night the workers decided to return to work the following day and agreed to train the new employees. They also decided not to react to the demotion of the two union officials, as control over events was being taken out of their hands by Ford management.

When the workers arrived at the engine plant on Wednesday, June 10, they were turned away. A Ford official informed them that Macwusa had not given management the required day's notice of the workers' intention to return.

The engine plant opened and workers returned on Thursday.



Ford workers leave the premises at the start of a 17 day strike

The organising secretary of Macwusa, Mr Zini, released a statement in which he said that Ford's demotion of Mr Neer and himself did not come as a surprise.

In an attack on the National Union of Motor and Rubber Workers of South Africa (Numarwosa), a Fosatu affiliate, Mr Zini said that it was ironic that representatives of pro-management unions

that had agreed to the "ill fated concept of company-paid shop stewards" had not suffered the same fate.

He gave an assurance to "coloured" workers at the motor company that Macwusa was non-racial and bore them no grudge and would "never allow this to develop into a racial issue".

In response the secretary of Numarwosa, Freddy Sauls, said it was unfortunate that Macwusa was being used by Ford management to divide workers along racial lines.

Labour observers feel that Ford's actions in fostering "misunderstandings" and demoting the two

union officials were designed to spread confusion and destroy worker confidence in Macwusa — Ford was in fact attempting to take control of the situation out of the hands of the workers, and put them in a position where they were reacting instead of acting.

Management's statement that the position of Macwusa's detained chairperson, Dumile Makanda, was "a matter between ourselves and the employee concerned" seemed to indicate that Mr Makanda would also be demoted on his release.

"Council, you're taking our rent!"

A mass meeting in Bonteheuwel has united community support against the City Council.

COUNCIL, you take our rent. You must maintain the houses' was the demand of more than 1 500 people who had gathered in Bonteheuwel recently to protest against the way the City Council has been refusing to do maintenance for all these years, even though the people have always paid their rent for repairs to the houses which are badly built.

People came from all over the cape flats to protest as a united body against what is a problem in all City Council areas — The Council refuses to repair the houses.

Community organisations belonging to the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) brought in busloads of tenants from Lavender Hill, Steenberg, Hanover Park, Factreton, Bokmakierie, Bridgetown, Silvertown, Kewtown, Eureka Estate, Clark's Estate, Avon Estate, Mitchells Plain, Manenberg and Ocean View to show support for the campaign to

force the Council to maintain the houses.

Representatives from many areas gave messages of support at the meeting.

'We are all affected by the Council's poor maintenance of our houses and we need to stand together to force them to maintain the houses, was the message brought by many of the speakers.

Under the banners 'A people united will never be defeated' and 'An injury to one is an injury to all' the people WERE united as they decided to refuse to pay for repairs and to demand that the Council drop the new lease.

This lease states that all new tenants and those on the transfer list have to pay for the repairs done to

their houses. Speakers at the meeting said that even old tenants have in the past been forced to pay for repairs.

As a speaker read out a resolution saying 'We must go back into our communities and organise so that our community organisations can be strong when we confront council,' the people applauded and raised their hands in agreement.

A banner hanging above the stage saying 'Die Council vat ons rent. Hulle moet die huise maintain' explained the feelings of the people and also their demands.

A speaker from CAHAC explained just what the Council did with the people's money.

'They lost millions of rands on the Good Hope Centre, Cape Town

Symphony Orchestra, Hartleyvale, Cape Town Civic Centre, Cape Town Festival, Republic Festival. Why do they say they don't have money to repair the houses?

'We are asking them now: What happened to the money we have paid as part of our rent that was supposed to be used for repairs and the money they received for the sale of Bloemhof Flats?

'The reason why Council waste our money is because we don't have the privilege to vote them out of power.

'We must force the Council to look at the way they are wasting our money. They can say they have no

money, but when we say we don't have, they threaten us with eviction,' he said.

Another speaker said the new lease was like tying a rope around the people's necks. He said the Council has also increased the deposits for new tenants without consulting the people.

The old deposit of ten rand for subeconomic and R15 for economic houses have been increased to a month's rent. This is supposed to be repaid when the people move out, but in most cases it is never done.

'Maintenance of houses should be paid by the homeowner. We do not have the same privileges as homeowners, neither do the houses comply with building regulations. So how can we pay for maintenance,' he said.

Another speaker said the people must strengthen their organisations if they wanted to overcome their problems.

'The Council is well-organised. We must be better organised. We must elect our own leaders', he said.