

Labour Action



UWUSA launch - aggressive from the outset

Photo: Billy Paddock

UWUSA, INKATHA and Security Police cash

The revelation by Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok that police funded Inkatha's United Workers Union (UWUSA) to the tune of R1,5-million will not come as a surprise to genuine trade unionists.

The Congress of SA Trade Unions has long maintained that UWUSA is an extension of Inkatha which enjoys the active support of the police.

The formation of the union in 1986 followed threats by Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi to launch Inkatha in the labour field to counter "COSATU insults and denigration". Its first general secretary, Simon Conco, was a former chief whip in the kwaZulu Legislative Assembly. His successor was also a former KwaZulu MP.

Secret police documents leaked to *The Weekly Mail* show that UWUSA was a security police

project. They also reveal that, by October 1989, Vlok was so concerned about the enormous debts accumulated by the union, and the threat that this might expose this covert police project, that he ordered an investigation into its affairs.

The documents also show the direct links between UWUSA and Inkatha, and between Inkatha officials and the police. The Inkatha official in charge of UWUSA was KwaZulu's powerful Interior Minister, Steven Sithebe, who also instructed Inkatha Institute director Gavin Woods to conduct a one-man commission of inquiry into the Inkatha union.

The Weekly Mail is also in possession of a copy of the commission's report, which explodes Vlok's claims that every cent of taxpayers' money paid to UWUSA was properly accounted for. It reveals that half of UWUSA's regions were unable to produce monthly records of

income and expenditure, that no regions maintained proper cash books, and that legally required annually audited financial statements were not presented in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

In their reactions to the Inkatha funding scandal, both Vlok and President FW de Klerk have studiously dodged the charge that by pouring money into the Zulu organisation and its labour surrogate, the state had subsidised violence.

Despite Vlok's claim that police funded UWUSA to promote labour stability and combat violence and intimidation, all the evidence points to the Inkatha union's extensive involvement in violence on the shopfloor, most of it directed at COSATU and its affiliates.

Perhaps the most shocking instance was the cycle of killings at kwaZulu Transport in Maritzburg, which followed an UWUSA recruiting drive at the company and which led to the death of seven Transport and General Workers Union members and three UWUSA members over a three-year period. The conflict was an important trigger for the endless round of political murders in the Maritzburg area.

In a statement released at its national congress, COSATU said UWUSA's low-intensity campaign of intimidation had escalated over the past year into a reign of terror against COSATU members. It said

UWUSA vigilantes had used tactics of forcible recruitment, had attacked National Union of Metalworkers' members involved in the recent metal industries' strike ballot and had been implicated in random attacks on Reef trains. ♦

(Drew Forrest)

SARHWU forces management to recognition

On 25 July, more than 30 000 members of South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) held a protest march through Johannesburg voicing their dissatisfaction at Transnet's wage increase from R750 to R900 a month. This increase had been negotiated in the Transnet Labour Council, a forum from which SARHWU is excluded. It was implemented while Transnet was negotiating with SARHWU outside the Labour Council.

The management of Transnet met the protesting workers and announced that the Labour Council increase would not be implemented. SARHWU members would receive a salary increase in August following wage negotiations with the union. A meeting between union and management was scheduled for 31 July.

The well organised march was led by SARHWU regional chairman, Nelson Ndinise. They were closely

monitored by riot control police in armoured vehicles, and stopped at Transnet's head office where a list of demands was presented to Mr Bredenkamp who is the parastatal's spokesman.

Later in the day, SARHWU officials received a formal letter from Transnet, confirming recognition of the union nationally. Although SARHWU had previously only been recognised in Natal, Transnet had been forced to enter wage negotiations with the union. These negotiations started on 9 July.

SARHWU had tabled the following demands to Transnet:

- Minimum wage of R1500 a month and a 40% increase for all members.
- Equal pension benefits for all Transnet workers.
- Immediate implementation of pay parity at all levels.

According to Vanguard Mkhosana, an official of SARHWU, "During our discussions with Transnet we were not aware of any intransigence. What surprised us was that Transnet unilaterally implemented the wage increase agreed in the Labour Council with the Black Trade Union (BLATU), without even consulting us. We were in the middle of negotiations and had not reached deadlock."

The attempt by Transnet to bypass SARHWU angered militant members of this

union.

The management of Transnet has historically used BLATU to avoid recognising the militant SARHWU. BLATU was established by the parastatal company as a sweetheart staff association for its black workers. Since the late 1980's BLATU has been discredited with workers and hit by mass resignations as workers flocked to join SARHWU. BLATU has since affiliated to NACTU.

It is for this reason that SARHWU - with 40 000 membership the largest union in Transnet - rejects the Labour Council wage increase as an agreement with "minor unions".

Recognition of SARHWU

Workers action on the 25 July forced the management to recognise SARHWU nationally.

SARHWU official Mkhosana explained: "Our recognition was limited to Southern Natal, where we were recognised in 1990 after strike action. Then it was taken that recognition would be extended to other regions as we proved that we had majority membership. This did to a certain extent affect our work since the employer would always want us to have 40% +1 of the workers in a branch before we could represent workers in that branch. Such demands were never made to sweetheart unions like BLATU. Despite that, we

were able to mobilise and organise workers for their social needs even in unrecognised branches."

The formal national recognition will now enable union officials to service the workers. Previously it was extremely difficult for SARHWU officials to consolidate their union structures. Union leadership experienced harassment and collusion between South African Transport Services (SATS, now Transnet) management and security police.

National recognition should also mean that SARHWU can longer be barred from negotiating in the Labour Council.

Unfair dismissals inflame the Northern Transvaal

When SARHWU officials met Transnet on 31 July, topics on the agenda were: attempts to solve the strike by 6 000 workers in Pretoria and the Northern Transvaal, wage negotiation and re-instatement of more than 55 workers who have been unceremoniously dismissed.

Amongst the dismissed workers is Karel Niewoudt (26), a white worker and member of SARHWU.

Before the meeting SARHWU declared: "Our meeting with Transnet will focus on the dismissal of fifty-four workers in Ladybrand. We also demand the implementation of our recognition agreement in Northern Transvaal and the

withdrawal of disciplinary charges against all strikers in Naboomspruit. We demand the inclusion of farmworkers in the Labour Relations Act.

"Transnet must negotiate in good faith. We hope that we will reach a positive agreement. They are aware of our strength and determination".

Niewoudt has become a symbol of unity amongst the workers in this racially divided country. 'Ou Karel', as workers call him, was laid off by Transnet due to his medical condition. He has to take medication for epilepsy, but was able to do his work without problems unless he forgot to take his medication.

SARHWU members in Pietersburg demand that Transnet re-instate him in an appropriate position, taking into consideration his medical condition. Striking workers have made this one of their demands.

White workers changing

Niewoudt is proud of belonging to a union that gives him protection. His white union had done nothing for him since he was retrenched. "If it were not for the union I don't know what would have happened to my family. SARHWU officials have bought me bread and some potatoes."

Other white workers in the Northern Transvaal are also changing their attitudes towards independent black trade unions. The solidarity



SARHWU – making progress in attracting white workers into its ranks

Photo: Kentridge Mathabathe/New Nation



says: "Members of NUMSA voted by a strong majority to engage in industrial action. In a last ditch attempt to try and settle the dispute, we met the employers again. For the first time they indicated that they were ready to table something in respect of a moratorium on retrenchment. They refused to increase the wage offer from R1 an hour. So we decided to engage in industrial action."

The strike started on the 22 July, and has paralysed the entire industry. Talks aimed at resolving the dispute broke down on 31 July, when employers withdrew, accusing NUMSA of not ensuring a return to work as agreed.

The strike comes after a process of negotiations which began early this year. At the beginning of the year, 1 200 workers were retrenched at Nissan in Pretoria. According to Hartford, "NUMSA needs to ensure that jobs are secured for its members. One of the key demands has been for job security, specifically a moratorium on retrenchments."

After the strike had started NUMSA dropped its wage demand from a R1,50 across the board increase to R1,20.

While the National Association of Automobile

that Karel is receiving from his colleagues has demonstrated to white workers that it is the black independent trade union that genuinely cares and will defend all workers regardless

of colour.

By the time this *Bulletin* went to print, negotiations between SARHWU and Transnet were still in progress. ♦
(*Snuki Zikalala*)

Auto workers on strike nationally

On 22 July, 25 000 workers from seven vehicle manufacturers downed tools in support of wage demands and the demand for a moratorium on retrenchments. This has become the costliest strike experienced in the industry. More than R500 million in turnover has been lost.

On 7 June NUMSA's auto council, which is made up of all shopstewards from auto plants, decided to declare a dispute on the grounds that the employers had refused to meet NUMSA with an

inflation-based increase, and had refused to table any offer whatsoever as regards job security.

After a declaration of dispute, a meeting was held with the employers. The employers refused to move on the wages issue. Their offer was R1 an hour increase. On the job issue, the employers were adamant. NUMSA did however manage to strike an agreement with the employers on training. Employers were notified that NUMSA was still in dispute and members would be balloted for industrial action.

NUMSA national organiser, Gavin Hartford,

Manufacturers of SA (NAAMSA) is claiming workers broke their commitment to end the strike, the union claims some companies closed their doors to workers.

Toyota SA had closed its Prospecton plant to returning strikers in Durban.

Volkswagen management in Uitenhage had told workers that it would not be paying any increased offer made by the National Bargaining Forum (NBF). This reflects a division amongst the employers themselves.

Mercedes Benz SA (MBSA) is the only plant that is not on strike. This suggests that organisation is still weak after the decisive factory occupation and strike last year.

NAAMSA and NUMSA met again on 2 August in an attempt to resolve the strike.

Hartford comment that after 40 hours of mediation with the employers, the union is hopeful that a settlement will be reached. "We have something on the table from management which is a good offer. This will be taken to our members for discussion and approval. We have agreed to meet the employers on 14 August. If we cannot reach an agreement workers will continue with the strike.

"If we secure a moratorium on retrenchments, this will set a precedent for COSATU affiliates in other industries, and will put COSATU at an advantage when negotiating with SACCOLA on a

moratorium."

● NUMSA also represents 3 000 tyre industry workers who downed their tools on 22 July. Workers are demanding better pay and job security. According to Hartford, no negotiations are taking place. Workers are still on strike. ♦

(Snuki Zikalala)

Metal workers fight for job security

The annual wage negotiations in the metal industry have been concluded without any strike action. The metal industry's 350 000 workers who were in dispute with the Steel Engineering Industries Federation (SEIFSA) won an increase of up to 15% cent.

On 31 July, the National Union of Metal Workers (NUMSA), a COSATU affiliate, the Metal and Electrical Workers Union (MEWUSA) and the Steel, Engineering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (SEAWUSA), both NACTU affiliates, and unions affiliated to the white Confederation of Metal and Building Unions (CMBU), signed an agreement which will provide workers with an average increase of 13%.

The agreement came after four months of negotiations. Employers had declared a dispute after the unions had refused the employer's final offer. SEIFSA had offered increases ranging from 9 per cent (86c an hour) to 12,6 per cent (48c an hour) for

artisans and unskilled workers. The settlement will raise the minimum to R5,00 at the bottom level and R10,44 at the top. Artisans will receive hourly increases of R1,14 and labourers 63c respectively.

NUMSA spokesman Alistair Smith said that the signed agreement is not a major victory and at the same time not a defeat. "We have made a number of major points through the agreement. For the lower paid workers, the employers have had to accept that we are not going to settle below the inflation rate.

"We have also made a couple of advances on the question of job security. Employers have agreed that they will make every effort to avoid retrenchment and redundancies and to reduce their impact on employees. They will negotiate with us on retrenchment. Currently employers don't negotiate retrenchment in good faith, they simply notify us about decisions.

"The wording in the agreement now binds them to negotiate in good faith. That will have to be tested in practise."

During the dispute NUMSA held a strike ballot. In the union's view the ballot was not satisfactory. According to Smith many employers were denying facilities to shopstewards.

The union had to cover about 150 000 members as well as non-members. There are 10 000 companies in the

industry which employ 350 000 workers, and NUMSA had to cover all these people within a period of two weeks. Of those who were balloted, 90% were for the strike. But it was quite impossible for NUMSA to reach all its members, so a strike was ruled out.

The threat of mass retrenchment also made the union cautious. "At the moment we are at a disadvantage in terms of bargaining power," says Smith. "The employers are completely unscrupulous and are not negotiating retrenchment in good faith. We fear that by the end of this year we might lose more than 35 000 workers."

Although "we are not happy on the wage issue", Smith believes the gains in job security are important. "They have agreed to make relevant information available to us on how to restructure the industry. We also agreed on training programmes. Instead of retrenchment there will now be re-training, particularly on the question of technological advancement."

The general secretary of MEWUSA, Tommy Olifant says he is pleased with the results. "Workers were prepared to take strike action if SEIFSA did not reach a compromise with us. This would have resulted in financial losses for the employers. We are happy that we managed to reach an agreement in a peaceful manner." ♦

(*Snuki Zikalala*)



Chrome avoids responsibility

Recently 215 workers were retrenched from a factory near Durban, called Chrome Chemicals. Because the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) was worried about the health of its members, the union appointed a doctor to obtain access to the factory medical records of 126 of these workers.

These records show that nearly 40% of the workers have large holes in the bony plate between their nostrils (nasal septum perforation) caused by the chrome dust. These holes cause problems for many of the workers - including pain in the nose, sinusitis, "runny nose" and bleeding from the nose. Worse still is that many workers have died from lung cancer caused by the chrome dust in the workplace.

The factory knew all about these problems for many years and yet did nothing about it. Workers who got lung cancer were simply put on early retirement and would usually die within some months. None of them received compensation. Neither did

any of the workers who had holes in their noses receive compensation.

There has been some publicity on this issue in the press and on television. Furthermore, two CWIU representatives recently went to Germany to meet with Chrome Chemicals' parent company Bayer.

Negotiations are still under way between the union and the company. The union is asking that the company assists it in obtaining compensation for their members, in addition to providing money for a trust fund to cover future health care costs of the retrenched workers.

This has been a clear example of how a multi-national company has exploited their workers and knowingly caused severe damage to their health. It is clear that workers cannot rely on management to look after their health.

The unions should have rights of access to information on chemicals used in the work place and the right of access to the plant in order to monitor working conditions. If workers had the right to have their own elected and trained safety representatives, problems like this would never have occurred. ☆
(*Mark Colvin, UND Industrial Health Unit*)