

Labour Action

Poultry workers against FAWU

Old battle scars in the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) were exposed at County Fair near Cape Town recently when poultry workers came out on strike against a wage settlement signed by FAWU.

The strike was organised by the Food Workers Council of South Africa (FUCSA) - formed by ex-Eastern Cape officials of FAWU who were dismissed from the union in 1989.

It also served as a reminder of the storms which rocked FAWU's Cape Town branch early last year and led to the controversial 'Campaign for Democracy' in FAWU.

The strike lasted about a week. More than 450 workers were fired on October 18 and only offered re-employment if they accepted the wage settlement and recognition agreement with FAWU.

FUCSA national organiser Monde Mkele said workers accepted management's offer, but refused to agree to the conditions. "They have resigned recently from FAWU. Is management now recruiting for FAWU?"

Mkele said FUCSA had signed up over 900, or more than half the workers at County Fair. "The main issue which got workers to join FUCSA was lack of servicing from FAWU," he said.

FAWU organiser Goodman Mefeki said FUCSA first recruited the chairpersons of the shop stewards committees at County Fair. "These shop stewards were sympathisers of a FAWU organiser who was expelled from the Cape Town

branch. Workers had confidence in these shop stewards and some went over to the FUCSA," he said.

Another shop steward who had been retrenched by County Fair was a supporter of the 'Campaign for Democracy' and had also organised workers for FUCSA, he said.

Mkele said FUCSA had no contact with the 'Campaign for Democracy'. "We've had nothing to do with them. They were not in existence when we started organising County Fair this year."

Mefeki said FAWU and the company settled at R30,50 across-the-board, but "FUCSA promised workers they would get R50. Some workers believed this and participated in an illegal strike", but according to Mkele, FUCSA went into the strike demanding R36, its position after mediation.

"They are going to destroy themselves," said Mefeki. "They are there to counter FAWU, not to represent workers."

No, says Mkele. FAWU lost its members at County Fair due to "carelessness".

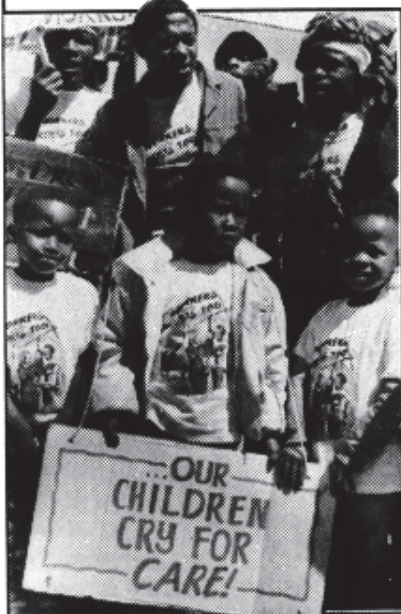
Workers will have to be the jury on this one. ♦

(Cape Town Correspondent)

The auto settlement and childcare

Auto employers have recognised childcare as a problem to be addressed jointly by employers and unions (as well as parents, the state and welfare authorities). The parties involved in the recent auto settlement (see page 25) agreed that the problem of childcare will "not be solved by additional leave, but by the provision of adequate child-

care facilities in workers' communities". The issue of childcare is to be taken forward through negotiations between shop-stewards and management at a local level. These local



Childcare is becoming a key issue of dispute for unions

Photo: Suzy Bernstein

negotiations would be obliged to consider the NUMSA guidelines on childcare.

The recognition of childcare as an issue of joint responsibility is a real step forward. Although no concrete plans emerge from the agreement, the commitment to local level negotiations provides the space to put the issue on the agenda in every workplace in the industry. If sufficient local pressure can be applied, communities should be able to involve employers in the provision of childcare facilities. ♦
(Lael Bethlehem)

PWV protest stayaway fails

On 17 September, residents from the PWV area ignored a two day stayaway called to protest against violence. The call was made by COSATU, the ANC Wits region and the Civic Associations of the Southern Transvaal (CAST).

Lack of consultation with the community was one of the major factors. It was a normal working day for Soweto residents. Transport services in the townships were not disrupted. The passenger loads of Transnet and Putco were normal. Pupils, however, responded "positively". The townships and the City were full of kids who were moving about

aimlessly, instead of attending classes.

On the way into Johannesburg, passengers in my taxi were discussing the stayaway.

Lack of information and consultation with the community was one of the issues that the passengers discussed. Some said that they read about the proposed strike in the papers. Their ANC branch leaders had not informed them about the possibility of a two day stayaway (that is if they knew themselves). They were worried about losing their jobs in this critical moment of economic recession.

As we were approaching the ANC Head Office in Bree street, one of the

passengers made a very sharp statement: "Those who are in that building don't know our feelings regarding the stayaway. We have hardly digested the signing of the Peace Accord. We don't know its implications and for sure, nobody from the ANC will explain to me about what was happening at the Carlton Hotel. The calling of the stayaway was untimely. Our children still lack the culture of education, and they will now take this opportunity to stay away from school. What is painful is that, our leader's children are not affected by the strike since they are schooling in white areas. Our leaders are not going to lose a day's pay. Their wages or allowances are not measured by production. In future they should learn to consult us."

COSATU Southern Transvaal secretary Amos Masondo admits that the strike was a failure. He says that the stayaway was not properly planned and the timing was bad. Union structures were not consulted.

"CAST approached us very late about the strike. We took a decision on 12 September, expecting workers to stayaway on the 17 th. The whole matter was not discussed by the region and there was not enough time to communicate with the workers. However, the intention was good, since there was a need to register our protest against violence. We have learnt a lesson. That

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is why the coming strike on VAT is well prepared. It is being discussed by all regions and workers are aware of the strike and its implications," says Masondo.

People should be not taken for granted. Hopefully the ANC, CAST and COSATU have learnt to consult, and feel the pulse of the masses. ♦
(*Snuki Zikalala*)

An injury to one, is an injury to all?

The 1990 strike at Mercedes-Benz

During the strike at Mercedes Benz South Africa (MBSA) last year, 542 workers were dismissed, (see *Labour Bulletin*, Vol 15 No 4 for details of the strike). In the agreement that ended the strike it was decided that these dismissals would be sent to arbitration. The hearing which took place at the beginning of the year confirmed the dismissals (except for 16 workers who could not be identified from photographs taken by management).

Ironically, arbitrator Chris Albertyn felt the workers' struggle for recognition of their special circumstances in relation to other employees in the industry was a legitimate struggle. They wanted some level of plant bargaining and (according to Albertyn) the union ought to have addressed their special problems with centralised bargaining (*Industrial Law Journal*, Vol 12, Part 3, 1991). Albertyn quoted from the September



NUMSA leadership at a rally during the Mercedes strike

Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin

1990 edition of Employment Law (which looked at the MBSA strike) to criticize union inflexibility on this point:

"Once again we find a rigid insistence on observance of the deal struck centrally ... and once again this adamancy causes disaffection on the factory floor ... But the underlying problem was ... insistence o[n] a single bargaining inflexibility".

The hearing centred around the 1989 recognition and the relationships by objectives [RBO] process that went with it. The recognition agreement allowed for 15 strikers nominated by the union to assemble during shift hours for the purpose of picketing at each of the company's entrances. The RBO agreed to prevent mock weapons, including AK47's and bazookas from being brought

into the workstation. Demonstrations would only take place on roadways.

Albertyn found that all these agreements were flouted during the strike. The pressure is now on the SACP, ANC and NUMSA. All agreed to support the dismissed workers. Indications are that NUMSA will appeal on cases of individual workers. ♦
(*Ashwin Desai*)

Strike at Ibhayi city council

The Ibhayi City Council controls the townships of New Brighton, Zwide, Kwazakele and Soweto-on-the-sea. In Port Elizabeth it provides its 330 000 inhabitants with about 3 500 library books, no play parks, no parks, no functioning swimming pools, tennis courts, or

bowling greens, one badly maintained athletics stadium and about half a dozen halls in varied conditions of maintenance or non-maintenance. Almost half of black housing stock in the area is shack, without running water, flush sanitation or electricity (Rory Riordan, *EP Herald*, September 3, 1991).

In the mid-1980's community councillors elected on to the Ibhayi City Council met such sustained opposition from the constituency it was supposedly representing, that many were, literally hounded out of the area. Today the Council has met its most militant opposition from within. Workers employed by the Council have engaged in a series of work stoppages.

Traffic officers strike

On 29 April, traffic officers employed by the council began a sit-in strike demanding that Council respond to a series of grievances, many of which were submitted in June the previous year. With the officers off the streets the traffic situation had become chaotic, with people using roads as race tracks. Despite appeals by the ANC and minibus taxi-owners, the City Council refused to negotiate. Finally, the conflict went before the Industrial Council. All the traffic officers were reinstated, including a colleague dismissed before the strike, and the Council agreed to look into the demands not met. The officers resumed duty on 4 June.

Council workers strike

The Council had barely caught its breath when about 1000 workers came out on strike on 7 August demanding back pay owed to them since 1987. As the strike continued through August, hygiene conditions sharply deteriorated in the townships. Sewage pipes in Zwide and Kwazakhele burst, emitting nightsoil and filthy water.

The workers returned to work on August 30 after the Industrial Council ruled that workers should have access to wage records. This was seen as a major victory.

"Red" sit in

While the strike was on, residents from Red location began a sit-in at Ibhayi City Council offices. They were demanding an immediate upgrading of an area where it is normal for six families to share a bucket toilet.

The sit-in was called off after the residents were promised R250 000 for emergency relief for 113 families. The president of PEBCO, Henry Fazzie, told the *Labour Bulletin* that residents called off the strike because it was felt the money for emergency victims was the first in addressing the problems at Red Location.

Financially and politically bankrupt

The Council's problems continue because it is bankrupt. By August 1991 it owed the Port Elizabeth City Council R6m for services such as water and electricity.

The problem for the Ibhayi City Council is that it does not have the political legitimacy or clout to pull in the nearly R17m in rent arrears owed by residents. If services are cut or scaled down this will make for an explosive situation.

A way out?

Rory Riordan in a perceptive analysis argues that one has to see the Port Elizabeth-Despatch-Uitenhage area as a single unit. Although the area is only home to about a million people it is serviced by nine local government institutions. The area has six town clerks and treasurers, a director of a Regional Services Council and 100 councillors. With the town clerks and director earning an average of R100 000 a year and the councillors R15 000 each annually, apartheid is a costly business. Riordan sees the need for just one council for the whole area consisting of "probably 50 councillors drawn on a non-racial basis, and one town clerk and one city treasurer" (*EP Herald*, Sept 3 1990).

What has been "white" PE's response to the one city, one council idea? Some PE council members responded positively. However, recent signs have been ominous. A Conservative Party member just elected onto the council in a by-election aims to fight all moves towards a non-racial council. ☆

(Authors: Ashwin Desai, Beverly Garson and Shadley Nash /PEN.)