

Mandela release: workers celebrate

11 February was a great day in South Africa. Stoppages occurred in many factories as workers celebrated the release of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. LUMKILE MONDI reports.

The surprise press conference on 10 February by FW de Klerk caught everyone unarmd. He was announcing the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison. There was jubilation at every corner of our country and around the globe as people started *toyi-toying*, awaiting his release. Celebrations continued over night and all roads on 11 February were leading to the Victor Verster Prison to catch a glimpse of Nelson Mandela.

It appears as though celebrations took place at many plants and factories around South Africa, but manifested themselves differently according to the strength of the unions. In a snap telephone survey, *Labour Bulletin* found that stoppages, demonstrations and marches occurred at factories in the East Rand, Johannesburg, Durban and some plants in Cape Town. The most sustained

action took place in the Eastern Cape, with stoppages ranging from one day to a week (see page 36).

Isando celebrations

The Tembisa - Germiston train on the East Rand is always full of action. Preachers deliver long sermons, gamblers and card-players settle down to

their hobbies and comrades chant revolutionary songs. On the 12 February most people had banners of the ANC, SACP, COSATU, etc. As the train stopped at Isando, workers alighted, singing and *toyi-toying* to the amazement of the white staff at the station. They marched on their factories as more people joined the celebration. The group then split up according to their factories.

Simba and FND workers demonstrated. They noticed that some people were not aware about what was being celebrated. Cardboards

were organised and workers started picketing. Some workers *toyi-toyed* to the airport nearby expecting that Nelson Mandela would land. There was no disruption of production at Simba.

At FND where workers had arrived an hour before, work started an hour late. They had gathered and *toyi-toyed*, angering supervisors. At lunchtime there was a meeting to discuss the Mandela Rally at FNB Stadium. Shop stewards were mandated to consult with management that workers were not coming the following day. The whole workforce went to the rally the following day and there was no production. The same happened at a number of other factories, including Propane (CWIU) and Beechams (SACWU). In other factories workers sent a delegation to represent them at the rally.

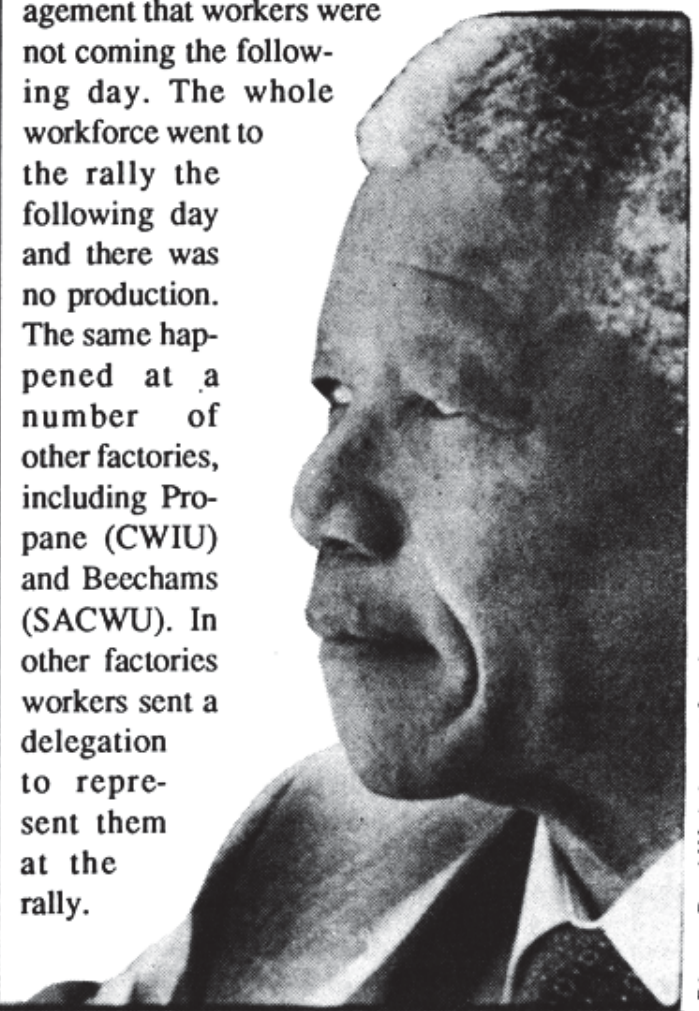


Photo: Paul Weinberg/Afrapix



At a SACWU (NACTU affiliate) organised factory workers celebrated, singing about Mandela, wearing stickers and carrying banners of the ANC. At lunch-time they marched to the canteen next to the administration office which is some distance from the workplace. The management was annoyed by the "noise". The workers replied that if they had been singing church songs, management would not have reacted, but it was reacting just because they were singing about Mandela.

The changed conditions within the country have raised expectations. Workers are celebrating not just the release of their leader, but also their coming liberation. Workers expect management to meet their demand. This has been a source of conflict at the workplace. Workers also claim that since Mandela's release the relationship with management and supervisors has worsened.

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According to Geoff Schreiner, co-ordinator of the joint union committee, "Five years industrial relations were way ahead of developments in the political arena. But in a short space of time, political developments have outstripped developments in the labour field.

"There is clearly a lot of pressure on employers now to put their houses in order as far as labour relations in the factories go. There is no doubt political developments are going to fuel workers' political expectations. Big business, as well as the unions, are going to have to meet these."

The article in this edition by Desai and Auf den Heyde on disputes in the Eastern Cape (p 36) reflects on the tensions, challenges and questions posed by the new situation. ☆

Release of Nelson Mandela:

workers respond in the Eastern Cape

Thousands of workers in the Eastern Cape stopped work in celebration of Mandela's release. JUDY PARFIT reports.

Most Uitenhage factories were deserted during the week following Nelson Mandela's release from prison. On Monday 12 February, thousands of workers walked off their jobs to celebrate the event, and several factories stood idle for the remainder of the week as violence erupted in KwaNobuhle, claiming 19 lives according to press reports.

These were the findings of a telephonic survey of 12 Uitenhage companies (employing 11 750 workers) conducted by the Industrial Relations Unit at University of Port Elizabeth. Ten (83%) of the employers that were contacted reported that their companies had experienced disrupted production on 12 February, the day following Mandela's release.

At eight of these companies, workers went home during the course of the morning (management agreed to unpaid time off after representation from shop stewards at four plants). Another two employer spokesmen said afternoon shift attendance that day had been poor, and attributed this to transport problems. All the companies in the sample adopted a policy of 'no work - no pay - no

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discipline'.

Ten companies recorded absenteeism levels ranging from 60% - 100% for the period Tuesday, 13 February to Friday, 16 February. (Eight of these companies experienced absenteeism rates of 99% - 100%). Most hourly-paid employees at these companies reported for work on Tuesday morning but had returned home by the afternoon, and stayed away for the rest of the week.

Only one of the factories in the sample enjoyed normal attendance. Management at another company said 10% of the workforce had not reported for work from Tuesday until Thursday, adding that employees had been granted unpaid leave on the Friday to enable them to attend a rally called to address the ongoing violence between Pan Africanists and African Nationalists in KwaNobuhle. Once again employers in the sample said a no work-no-pay-no discipline policy would apply.

Half of the employers telephoned said they had been approached by workers or union representatives demanding that employees who supported the Pan Africanist Movement (PAM) be dismissed. These demands had been rejected. Some of the employer comments are reported below:-

- We have been asked by the union to dismiss PAM supporters on the grounds that they are intimidating other employees. The company had said that evidence must be produced, in which case the disciplinary procedures will be followed.
- We can't dismiss PAC sympathisers: it would be an unfair labour practice.
- Our shop stewards are confident that we have no PAC sympathisers working for us. But demands at other companies for their dismissal are ludicrous considering that COSATU has fought for many years against unfair dismissals.
- We can't accede to demands for the dismissal of PAM supporters. We will have to try to educate these guys to political maturity, but is that an employer's role? The trouble is that

Uitenhage companies are bleeding to death simply because they are located in Uitenhage.

This last comment is symptomatic of mounting employer concern in Uitenhage, which experienced widespread and sometimes protracted industrial action last year, and which consistently records the highest stayaway figures in the country. One company is said to be exploring the option of relocating to the Ciskei.

Port Elizabeth

The unit telephoned 42 Port Elizabeth companies (employing a total of 25 000 workers) on 13 and 14 February to establish the extent to which workers downed tools to mark Mandela's release. Workers at three of the factories canvassed were on strike.

Of the remaining 39, eight had experienced some form of action: at two plants, lunch-time demonstrations were held without loss of production, while six companies were affected by stoppages ranging in duration from 10 minutes to 2 hours. At one of these plants, workers were sent home after failing to resume work at the end of a management-sanctioned lunch-time demonstration. Only one of the companies agreed to pay workers for time not worked - in this case, two hour stoppages on

each of three shifts. None of the employers intended taking disciplinary action.

Indications are that further worker protests occurred later in the week. An employer contacted on Wednesday, 14 February 1990 said he had been approached by the union to approve a two-hour paid stoppage the following Friday. Management endorsed the proposed action after the union hinted that workers would take the entire day off if a no pay policy applied.

One employer reported that workers had been briefed on company policy regarding absenteeism related to Mandela's release a week before the African National Congress leader was freed. Employees were told that the company was willing to grant leave applied for in advance. According to management, workers accepted this. ☆

Despite its high unemployment rate, Uitenhage consistently records the highest stayaway figures in the country.