

15 16278 - Trade Union Training box



---

# **REGIONAL EDUCATORS' WORKSHOP ON TRADE UNION HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

---

# OVERALL OBJECTIVES:

- \*to provide comrades with an understanding of the development of unions in South Africa
- \*to promote a sense of the importance of assessing historical developments
- \*to promote a sense that comrades doing the workshop are part of creating history for future generations
- \*to help comrades doing the workshop draw out and share lessons of past and present history
- \*to help equip comrades to be able to conduct a workshop on the development of unions in South Africa

In this pack you will find:

PART ONE : A summary of the workshop and guide for the comrade presenting the workshop

PART TWO: The inputs, charts, and pictures to be used

PART THREE: Additional background reading and information

# **PART ONE: SUMMARY OUTLINE OF THE WORKSHOP:**

---

**SESSION ONE:** The lives of workers in history (15 minutes)

**SESSION TWO:** Discussion of Session one and discussion of the experience and ideas of comrades doing the workshop (20 minutes)

**SESSION THREE:** Input: The development of trade unionism between 1917 and the 1950's (35 minutes)

**BREAK:** 10 minutes

**SESSION FOUR:** Video or pictures (20)

**SESSION FIVE:** Input: The development of trade unionism between the 1950's and today (35 minutes)

**SESSION SIX:** Preparing to make a poster: Recording the main lessons of history (15)

# A GUIDE FOR THE COMRADE WHO IS PRESENTING THE WORKSHOP

## SESSION ONE:

The lives of workers in history: (15 minutes)

Method: The comrade presenting the workshop will read the brief extract from the life-story of Mandlenkosi Makhoba
--



## SESSION TWO:

The experience and ideas of comrades doing the workshop. (20 minutes)

### Method:

In plenary or small groups, the comrade presenting the workshop will ask comrades doing the workshop to share ideas and experience from their own lives and talk about their own histories.

The comrade presenting the workshop will ask specifically about needs, lessons of struggle, and problems which stand in the way of the struggle to meet those needs.

### Alternative method:

The comrade presenting the workshop will ask one or more particular comrades who have got a long history in the struggle to share ideas and experiences from that history.

## Discussion:

In plenary, comrades doing the workshop will discuss the story of Makhoba and the stories they have heard from other comrades in the workshop. The comrade presenting the workshop will write down all the responses, recording them in three sections:

- a. the needs of workers in history
- b. the problems workers face in fighting for those needs
- c. the lessons of struggle

## SESSION THREE:

Input on the history of trade unions from 1917 to the 1950's. (35 minutes)

Method: The comrade presenting the workshop will read the input, or get one or more of the comrades doing the workshop to read the input aloud.

The comrade presenting the workshop will use a wall chart to show different organisations through history.

### Discussion:

The comrade presenting the workshop will then open a brief discussion, asking comrades to share their thoughts about what they have heard in the input. The comrade presenting the workshop will record the discussion using the same three headings used before:

- ☐ needs
- ☐ problems in the way
- ☐ lessons.

## SESSION FOUR:

A video of the history of workers struggle: (20 minutes)

### Method:

The comrade presenting the workshop must show the video. (if there are no resources to show a video, then the comrade presenting the workshop must use the set of pictures which is provided)

The comrade presenting the workshop must open up a discussion about the importance of having a picture of the past - and making sure that we have a picture of the struggle today, so that our children can see it in the future.

### Discuss:

What are the best ways to make a picture of our struggle today so that our children can see it and learn from it?

How can we make such a picture in this workshop (the comrade presenting the workshop should propose a poster, if there is no other practical suggestion)

## SESSION FIVE:

The 1950's to today: (35 minutes)

Method: The comrade presenting the workshop, or one or more other comrades will read the input on the 1950's to today.

### Discussion:

Method: The comrade presenting the workshop must turn the eyes of the comrades to what has been written up - the needs; the problems; the lessons, and briefly summarise what the discussion has shown already. Then the comrade presenting the workshop must open up discussion on the input.

If it is necessary to have questions, the comrade presenting the workshop can use these questions:

- ☐ What are the things we need? Have they changed over the years?
- ☐ What are the problems we face? Have they changed over the years?
- ☐ Do you agree that we are stronger today than ever before?

## SESSION SIX:

Recording the lessons of today for the struggle of tomorrow (15 minutes)

### Method:

In Session four, comrades have already discussed the best way of carrying a message from this workshop to others outside and others in the struggle that is still coming. The comrades must now turn to this job. If the comrades have agreed to make a poster, we suggest that the comrade presenting the workshop asks the comrades:

What lesson do you want to carry from your struggle and from this workshop to your children and all generations to follow?

The comrade presenting the workshop should try to get slogans.

The comrade presenting the workshop can use the ILRIG poster made by dismissed workers as an example - because it was made for the same purpose, using the same method, after a workshop discussion.

# NOTES:

1. Session 1 is the life-story of Makhoba. We have included some other life-stories in the pack. Comrades must choose another story if they think it is more useful. In one workshop, comrades decided to act out the life story, not just read it.

2. It can easily happen that comrades doing the workshop start discussing more recent history in their discussion about Session 1 and Session 2 and Session 3. If that happens - IT IS NOT A PROBLEM. It shows that comrades doing the workshop are taking history and making it their own; and connecting it to the situation today. These are goals of the workshop. The comrade presenting the workshop should not worry or try to stop discussion which goes from the past to today - even if that is going to be repeated again in another Session.

3. The comrade presenting the workshop will have to decide whether to have discussion in small groups or in a plenary. Here are some ideas about how to decide:

a. how many comrades doing the workshop are there? If there are only a few eg. 10, it might be better to stay in one group

b. are there different jobs that need to be done at the same time? Then it is better to divide into groups and make sure that each group has got a different job.

c. If you have not got time afterwards for a report-back, usually it is better not to divide into small groups. Comrades are left wondering what was discussed in the other groups.

d. One main purpose of dividing into small groups is to give comrades a chance to talk without feeling intimidated. But the comrade presenting the workshop can try to make sure that comrades do not feel intimidated to speak in a large group also - and ask all other comrades to assist in this. Also, it is sometimes the case that even when you divide into small groups, the same few comrades do all the talking. The comrade presenting the workshop must make a judgement whether that will happen. If it is going to happen, dividing into small groups is not serving the purpose.

e. There are other ways of helping comrades to participate, without going into small groups. One way - if there are not too many comrades - is for the comrade presenting the workshop to ask all comrades participating direct questions which each comrade must answer.

4. The comrade presenting the workshop will have to decide whether to begin discussion after the inputs with questions. From experience, it is better to ask rather for comments, instead of putting questions straight away. When you ask for comments - you find out what the comrades doing the workshop are thinking about from the Sessions. Sometimes it is a good idea to ask whether the Session has given them some ideas that they want to share or questions that they want to discuss. If you find or decide that you need questions, we suggest that you ask about the three main themes:

a. what were the main needs and demands of workers at that time?

b. what were the problems that stood in their way?

how did they try to overcome them?

why were they not completely successful?

c. what lessons can we learn from their struggle to help us today?

# PART TWO:

## INPUT FOR SESSION ONE:

---

### EXTRACTS FROM "THE SUN SHALL RISE FOR THE WORKERS" BY MANDLENKOSI MAKHOBHA

The sun is beginning to rise on the workers. Fears of intimidation and victimisation are being dried up by this rising sun of workers strength. I tell this story to remind you of your life. I tell you this story so you will remember your struggle and the story of the struggle we fight. AMANDLA!

I came to the urban areas with someone from home. I found the city a strange and ugly place. Finding work was not an easy task.

But I found work at the foundry called Rely Precision Castings and I worked there for over seven years until May 1980 when Management fired all of us because of a strike.

The work in the foundry was hard and dangerous and the hours were long. But I stuck out the tough and unsafe working conditions because there was no other place to go. We were the only people who could do this kind of work, and this was well known to our employers. Many of them knew migrant workers were the best workers. We were also prepared to do the heaviest of work. But they still treated us badly and still didn't treat us like human beings but like animals. They knew that as soon as they expelled us we would lose a place of residence, because we would not be able to pay the hostel fees without the money we earned. Then the pass office would be indifferent and instruct us to go back where we came from. That is very painful. But what is more painful is this. It is clear that profits mean more to the bosses than our lives. Our children could die in the countryside but they would still fire us.

Our work was tough, especially after the new machine was bought by the bosses in the foundry. But we were not afraid of hard work. We did not complain about the work. The grievances were about those things that prevented us from doing our work. The bad and unsafe working conditions were dangerous to our health and lives. These things are important. But most of our grievances at Rely were about the bad treatment we received from the indunas and foremen.

The indunas did not support us when the struggle for better wages and working conditions began. They were only concerned with organising things in the foundry which made their own lives easier.

The indunas at Rely were supposed to be the workers' voice but we have seen that this was not true. So we had no voice. We could not make our complaints heard. That makes a person very angry. And so my fellow workers and I decided to do something about this. We began to stand together and build workers' strength and unity in the foundry. Our combined strength would be a very loud and confident voice.

One day one of us suddenly said: "There is a place that can help us." This worker had been to the Union with his brother-in-law who works at another factory. We wanted to know what that could be. We said we knew a union called 'Let-us-bury-each-other'. This is a union that cheats people. They say when you have given a lot of money to them then they will build you a big house or buy you a car. The guy said, 'No. that's not what I mean.' 'It's a place to go as we are not being treated well in the firm. When we all join they will represent us. They will speak to the employers.'

At first many of the workers at Rely were scared about joining the Union. Others were cautious.

We first started joining in twos and threes until we were thirty.

The meetings we had with the Union organiser were important. We talked and discussed problems for a long time on Saturday afternoons. Inside the foundry there was even more talk and discussion. During lunchtimes meetings were held over the road from the foundry under the shade of a tree.

At these meetings everybody had a chance to speak. Some people wanted to move quickly, while others were more cautious. Some people were afraid for their families and others did not want to lose their jobs in the foundry. Many workers had worked at Rely for a long time and had good service records and so we were hesitant. The discussion was often long and serious.

Slowly the fear began to get less as people learned more about the Union from friends and relatives in other factories. Some of these factories were already organised. But it was the meetings among ourselves which helped the most. In the evenings also, at the hostels, people discussed Union business and one thing began to become very clear. Everyone had to stand together and speak with one voice if we were going to be strong inside Rely.

After many meetings and much talking we decided there would never be safe conditions if everyone did not join the Union. Wages would never rise without the force of all the workers.

But when the indunas saw unity among the workers they were afraid. We even told them that through this unity their positions would soon end.

Our unity had already begun to change things in the foundry. The bosses and their children, the impimpis and indunas, were not so sure of their position and began to fear workers. This was happening all over the East Rand where the Metal and Allied Workers Union was building workers' unity.

(In May 1979, the workers went on strike.)

We stopped work to ask Management why they fired Zondiwe.

Our bosses did not know what to do when 55 workers stood in front of them to protect Zondiwe. They called the Employers' Association. They called the Department of Labour. They called the police. We were a small group of people. They tried to crush us. But we fought them all in different ways.

We were unemployed. And when you are out of a job, you realise that the boss and the government have the power to condemn you to death. If they send you back home, and back home now there's a drought, and you can't get any new job, it's a death sentence. The countryside is pushing you into the cities to stay alive; the cities are pushing you into the countryside to die. You get scared. It's a fear that you come to know after a week without any food.

After six weeks we all went to court. The court found us all guilty of striking illegally. We were all fined. But the Union paid the fines from the subscriptions. We had been fired from our jobs. We had been beaten by the SAP and now we were guilty of striking. We were very sad but we were not defeated. We continued our struggle.

Our struggle at Rely was important. We are not afraid to say it. We showed how even a small group of workers can stand up against the bosses. And it was important in another way as well. Our strike was the first in our big strike wave which hit the East Rand. From 1980 and 1981 many, many thousands of us metal workers went on strike.

We were not alone in our struggle. It was not just 55 of us at Rely. Our struggle was in May 1980. By the end of that year there were 12 000 in our Union, the Metal and Allied Workers Union. The next year was the year of strikes. From July until the end of 1981 many of our fellow metal workers went on strike. There were 50 strikes. There were 25 000 of us on strike. Next time we will be united.

At Rely our struggle started when we united. But in the factory it ended when we were not united to our brothers in other factories. But we have learned. And you too. You must not make the same mistake. The big factories must help the small one. If you are organised in a trade union when you go on strike, unite with those who are not organised. Together call the communities to our side. Then we will be united. And we know that when we make our unity, the sun shall rise for the workers.



# INPUT FOR SESSION THREE:

## THE HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM - 1917 TO THE 1950'S

### **THE FIRST UNIONS FOR BLACK WORKERS**

In 1917, workers and peasants in the Soviet Union made the most important revolution in the history of our struggle for socialism. Here in South Africa at that time, very few black workers were organised. There were trade unions, but most of their members were white workers. There was a political party which said it was socialist - the Labour Party - but it collaborated with the bosses and their political parties, and only allowed white members.

But the politics of the Russian Revolution reached South Africa and entered into the hearts of a few socialists. At that time, they came together in an organisation called the International Socialist League. Later, with others, they formed the Communist Party. Many of them were whites from the middle class. Others were officials in the white trade unions. Slowly, they began to take the idea of the Russian Revolution to black workers. And they found workers with many needs, many problems, and people who were already in struggle.

The first trade union organisation for African workers was called the Industrial Workers of Africa. You could put all the members of that organisation into one room. But even from that time, thousands of workers who were not in organisations were already struggling against the bosses and their government. Already they were burning passes, and boycotting against high prices, and striking for wage increases. Even if they did not have the idea of socialism in their heads, they were part of the struggle. Because they were workers with needs who faced the bosses and the government.

At that time, it was not just organisation of workers that was young. Industry in South Africa was also young. As capitalist industry developed, the bosses filled their pockets. But something else was happening at the same time. The working class was growing and getting stronger. And inside the working class, the number of black workers was also growing - and their position was getting stronger.

### **THE ICU - MASS ORGANISATION**

In the 1920's, struggle and organisation spread across the country like a veld fire. A mass organisation rose up - called the ICU. At the same time, the small ANC became more militant. And the CPSA began to work more with black workers.

The ICU was not just an organisation for workers. Inside the ICU were teachers, and churchmen and peasants being thrown off the land. There were chiefs and even businessmen. They were all together in one organisation, fighting against racial oppression. But they were not always all fighting for the same thing. Inside the ICU - the workers were not strongly organised to speak with their own voice; there was little workers democracy and no workers control. Leadership began to compete with each other - and the ICU split in many different pieces. And just when that was happening, at the end of the 1920's, the state attacked.

### **CAPITALIST CRISIS AND STATE ATTACKS**

The state could not live with a movement of struggle that was growing. All across the world, there was a capitalist crisis. And it was the same with any crisis - the bosses tried to make workers the victims. But there was something standing in their way - the organisation of the masses. So they attacked it - with murder, vigilantes, arrest, banishments. And the truth is that they attacked an organisation that was already weak from problems that it had created itself.

This was a time of bitter struggle. Thousands of people were looking for organisation. Some of them turned to the Communist Party. 10,000 joined the trade unions in a federation called FNETU and then AFTU that was led by members of the Communist Party. Inside the Communist Party, there were some who stuck to the politics of the 1917 revolution. But others started to follow the politics and undemocratic methods of Stalinism. And that politics led to many expulsions and divisions - so that workers were joining a Party and unions in which the disease of Stalinism was spreading.

## **THE GROWTH OF INDUSTRY MEANT GROWING STRENGTH OF THE WORKING CLASS**

So the state attacks were successful. And the bosses went into the 1930's thinking that things were under their control. Industry grew. Profits grew - but the strength and determination of the working class grew also. Maybe the government and the rich farmers were successful in forcing thousands of people off the land. But those people came to the towns looking for jobs and houses and wages and all the things that we ourselves need. There in the growing towns, they were not on their own. They found hundreds and thousands of workers just like themselves. So they turned to each other. Organisations began to grow again. The number of strikes went up. By the end of the 1930's there were two groups of unions:

THE CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE (with about 4 000 members)

THE JOINT COMMITTEE (with about 20,000 members)

But again, there were leaders who would not work with others in the struggle who had different politics. And again, it was the bosses who were the ones to benefit.

## **THE WAR, THE ANC, AND NEW MASS ORGANISATION**

In 1939, the South African government took South Africa into the imperialist world war. The war increased the bargaining strength of black workers. Many of the white workers joined the army and blacks took their places. The government was desperate for production to continue to help in the war effort. The number of strikes began to grow.

In 1941, a new federation called CNETU was formed. In the same year, the AMWU was also formed. The government began to talk about reforms - even getting rid of the pass laws. Then at the end of 1942 and 1943, workers took history into their own hands, and built the biggest strike wave there had ever been in the history of South Africa. In 1943 there was a bus boycott in Alexandra township. And then in 1944 there was a massive struggle of squatters for land and houses in the urban areas near Johannesburg.

The government was ready to talk about change. But they were not ready to watch workers creating those changes and struggling to meet their needs through their own action. They brought in a new law which said that all strikes were illegal. The talk about reforms disappeared - and the government and the bosses demanded that the leaders of the workers organisations impose discipline. At this time, after Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, the Communist Party was also supporting the war. And many of the union leaders followed the politics of the Communist Party. So when the strikes began, they said they supported the demands of the workers, but tried to stop the action. Most of the ANC leaders also supported the war. But more and more workers decided that the issues right in front of them were more important. So they took action. Often, that action did not have the support of leadership. And often, one group of workers taking action was isolated from another.

In 1944, the AMWU had a conference and delegate after delegate demanded strike action. But the leadership convinced the workers to wait. In 1946, after the end of the war, workers would wait no longer. They built the biggest strike ever - and the same government that spoke about change and reform and co-operation during the war broke the strike with guns and bayonets. With the policy of co-operation with the government, and then the defeat of the miners strike, CNETU began to crumble as a fighting force. In 1945, it had 158,000 members. A few years later, it did not exist any more.

In 1948, the nationalists were elected. They took over from a government which had already declared all strikes illegal and broken the miners strike through violence and intimidation. And they took over at a time when union organisation of black workers was already weakened.

One of the first jobs of that government was to tighten its grip over the white workers. For a long time, Nationalist politicians from the middle class and capitalists had their eyes on the white workers, especially the Afrikaans workers. They wanted their support and their strength. It was not so hard to deepen racism and tie the white workers to the bosses and their political parties with promises. These things had already been happening for years, with the help of the Labour Party and conservative white trade union leaders. More and more white workers began to see their future with the Nationalists. Many of them were Afrikaners who were driven off the land by the same capitalist crisis that drove black people off the land at the beginning of the 1930's.

The new Nationalist government took action against the few union leaders who were trying to bring progressive politics to the white workers. They took action to outlaw united organisation between black and white workers. They did this at a time when white workers could not easily see the real strength of black workers. So more and more white workers turned to the promises coming from the new Nationalist government and put their hopes in an alliance with the bosses against black workers.

Amongst black workers, the anger began to grow. They were now facing the apartheid government. They were facing bosses who again thought that they were in control. They had to go home from exploitation at work to townships that were getting more and more crowded; without proper housing, or electricity, or child-care or schools. They had to face a government which was trying to harden control over black workers through the Group Areas and forced removals. They had to listen to the crying of more and more children being born in the towns and coming to the towns from the rural areas. The anger grew. The needs were great. When that happens, workers turn to each other. They turn to organisation and action.

So in the 1950's, there was mass organisation and mass action again. The ANC launched the Defiance Campaign. For generation, workers had already been defying the Pass Laws. Now they turned to the ANC. For the first time in its history, workers made it a genuine mass organisation. Later, SACTU was formed. Still there were many questions in front of workers in struggle:

- ☐ how could workers defend themselves against the attacks from the bosses and the government?
- ☐ what was the best way forward in the struggle for the day to day needs of the working class?
- ☐ how could the the Nationalists be defeated?
- ☐ could there be an alliance between workers and bosses who exploited them, but said they also opposed the Nationalists?
- ☐ what should be the link between the trade unions and the ANC?
- ☐ what was the best connection between the struggle against apartheid and the struggle for socialism? what politics could take workers forward?

Even today, those same questions are there, in front of us. The same struggle for workers control and workers democracy that we are fighting today was there also at that time. We know today that the struggle against the bosses and government at that time was not victorious. But it was building the foundations that we stand on today, as we continue the struggle to bury all oppression and exploitation for all time.

**ICU** - Industrial and Commercial Union

**CPSA** - Communist Party of South Africa - disbanded in the face of state threats in 1950 and reconstituted as the SA Communist Party

**FNETU** - Federation of Non-European Trade Unions

**AFTU** - African Federation of Trade Unions

**CNETU** - Council of Non-European Trade Unions

**AMWU** - African Mine Workers Union

**SACTU** - South African Congress of Trade Unions

# INPUT FOR SESSION FIVE:

## WORKERS' STRUGGLE FROM THE 1950'S TO TODAY

In the 1940's and the 1950's workers built strong weapons of struggle. They became more and more confident to fight against their poverty and oppression. And at this time workers and all the oppressed built their organisations like the ANC, the PAC and SACTU. Through these organisations workers built unity and mass action. There was the Defiance Campaign, the Freedom Charter Campaign and the Pound a Day Campaign. There were strikes and protests and national stayaways.

Our parents faced many difficult problems in their struggle. There were weaknesses and mistakes. There was strong repression. There were setbacks and defeats. All of this put big questions in front of them.

- ☐ How can we bring more workers into organisation?
- ☐ How can we build greater unity in our struggle?
- ☐ How can we build worker control over our organisations and our campaigns?
- ☐ How can we build worker leadership in the struggle against apartheid and capitalism?
- ☐ How can we build our defence against all the attacks coming from the bosses and the government?

And then in 1960 the government came with a big repression. Our people were shot dead at Sharpeville, our leaders were arrested and the ANC and PAC were banned. But this did not stop our struggle. In the next year the Congress Alliance called for a 3 day stayaway against all this repression. It was the biggest stayaway at that time but it was the last national strike for many many years.

After 1961, the Congress movement decided that its non-violent strategy was not enough to win power in South Africa. The sabotage campaign, and later the armed struggle, began. Many SACTU organisers became involved in this underground struggle. Many others were detained and jailed and many went into exile.

So workers could not longer see the organisations that they had built. The confidence of workers to struggle was still there, it carried on for two years after 1961. But when their organisations went underground it was hard for ordinary workers to find their place.

In the 1960's workers became less confident to struggle. Workers no longer had unions that they could call their own. It was the years when there was no mass action and mass organisation. But we did not forget what we had done in the past. We carried our history with us until we were ready to use it to build new weapons. So even if the bosses and the government felt strong in the 1960's, even if they increased their attacks on us in a thousand ways, even if they made bigger profits than ever before out of our sweat and blood, we were not defeated. The day of new mass action and new mass organisation was coming.

And the first big sign that we were ready to take mass action again came when 60,000 workers in Durban went on strike for higher wages. When they marched in the streets in January 1973 they carried the suffering and hope of all workers in their slogan, "Filumntu ufesadikila" - "Man is dead, but his spirit still lives."

The strikes in 1973 did not just belong to one group of workers. It was a time when workers everywhere were no longer prepared to sit quiet with low wages. It was a time when workers were once again confident to raise their voice against the violence of poverty and political oppression. This was the time when we came out against all the repression to build our movement of struggle again.

Those were hard years of struggle. We can remember them. We can remember how we came into unions in different ways. Some of us were building industrial unions like MAWU, NUTW, CWIU, CCAWUSA and SFAWU. Some of us joined the general unions like SAAWU and GWU. The bosses and the government did not just sit back and let this happen. They attacked our organisation, they met our action with violence and dismissals, and they detained and banned our leaders.



We can remember that when we started to organise our struggle again we carried the questions and lessons from the past with us. We learned that our strongest defence was to build united mass action and make sure that the union was deep in the factory. This was where we could build worker democracy, worker control and worker leadership. This was where we could build the strength to defend our organisation and keep it in our hands. We fought hard for union recognition. And we built strong foundations for our unions in shop steward councils.

We can also remember how the law of the bosses and the government said that we could not have independent non racial trade unions. But even this did not stop us. Instead we forced the government of the bosses to change the law and recognise our right to build our own trade unions. This happened with Wiehahn in 1979.

This victory gave us great confidence to build even bigger organisation and bigger mass action. Remember how we started to organise on the mines and how we built the union federations of FOSATU, CUSA and AZACTU. Remember the meat workers strike, the Fattis and Monis strike, and the strikes at the Uitenhage car factories. We also built many struggles in our communities around housing and education. This was the time when we grew confident to take mass action against the bosses and the government.

In those years there were many questions in front of us. One of the biggest questions was how to build our trade union struggle together with our struggles in the community and our political struggle. There were many different answers from different organisations. The politics of banned organisations was alive in the hearts of many. Some unions joined the UDF. Some unions had Black Consciousness politics. Some unions said they must stay independent of community and political organisations.

Sometimes we did not know how to give a good answer to this question. Even today we are still looking for the best answer. Division and conflict often eat away our strength. In 1976 the youth fought against the government without the strongest possible unity with workers. But we learned from our struggles and our conflicts so that in 1984 we built a powerful united front of struggle in the Vaal Stayaway. That was the action which showed us how strong we can be when we fight for all our needs as a class. From that time we have been more confident about building a wide fighting unity.

Even our children remember those years. It was then, in 1984 and 1985 that we went to war against the bosses and the government. We made important steps in building our organisations and our action. Since 1981 we had been preparing to build a single trade union federation. And after four years we launched COSATU. Even if it did not bring all the unions, even if another federation, NACTU, was also formed, we were building the strongest worker unity ever.

And with our new weapons we made some of the biggest worker action ever in this country. There was the OK workers strike for a Living Wage in 1986. There was the big miners' strike and the SARHWU strike in 1987. There was the stayaway of millions of workers against the LRA in 1988. There are many struggles we can remember. There were more strikes in 1989 and 1990 than ever before in our history.

And inside our federation COSATU we have done things that we never dreamed were possible. We have brought different unions together into single industrial unions. We built strong worker democracy and worker leadership. We have organised workers who have never been in unions. We have built national campaigns for a Living Wage, for a workers' LRA and for a Workers' Charter. We built strong relationships with youth organisations, civics, womens' organisation and political organisations. We have held Workers' Summits of COSATU, NACTU and independent unions. We have built a working class voice that the bosses and the government are forced to listen to. Through our organisation and our action we even forced them to unbanned our organisations.

There was a day when we were too weak even to raise our voice in the factory. Today we take our voice into a campaign for a Constituent Assembly so that we can have a government and laws that will put workers' rights in the constitution. We are taking forward our struggle for workers power and socialism like never before.

Today we can celebrate because of all the things we have done. But we must speak straight also. There are problems in front of us, mistakes that we must never make again, and lessons that we must learn. We cannot just celebrate. The job is still there. The struggle is not over. The needs are still too great. Even today the attacks from the bosses and the government are many - privatisation, retrenchments, attacks on living standards, attempts to buy us off with talk of a partnership between bosses and workers.

Even when we look now we can see that we are not as strong as we must be. We can see that we have still not built enough unity between our organisations. We can see that many of our campaigns are sitting on the shelf. We can see that even with our organisations, there are many comrades who are still not organised. We can see that we do not have enough general meetings. Too many meetings belong to leaders, not the rank and file. Too many decisions come from other people, not us. Too often, lawyers and experts are the ones who decide. But democratic workers control says that it must be us. We know that we can do more from our unions to build our federation into a stronger fighting weapon and organise more powerful mass action. We know that we can use our organisations to build greater solidarity actions and working class unity. All the time, the bosses and the government are trying to convince and force and intimidate our leaders. The problems come when they hear the enemy all the time, not us.

Today we have strong weapons in our hands. We have built these weapons on the foundations of our long history of struggle. We know what we can do when we fill our organisations with our strength. We know what can happen when we take mass action. At that time, we are the ones who make history. Today we have a chance like we never had in all of our history to fill our organisations with our strength. Our needs have never been greater. Our demands have never been clearer. Our voice has never been louder. We have never had so much history behind us to give us confidence and experience and knowledge for our way forward.

## **FORWARD TO SOCIALISM**

# CHART OF DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS THROUGH HISTORY

# PICTURES TO BE USED

These are pictures which show workers' lives.

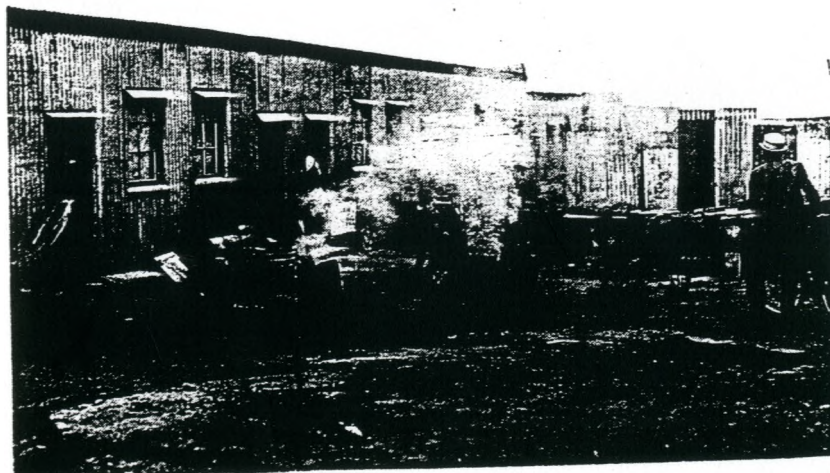
They have been divided up into different sections looking at different aspects of workers' lives.

In each section there are pictures from long ago and also from today.



# 1. Workers' Living Conditions

The 1940's and 1950's





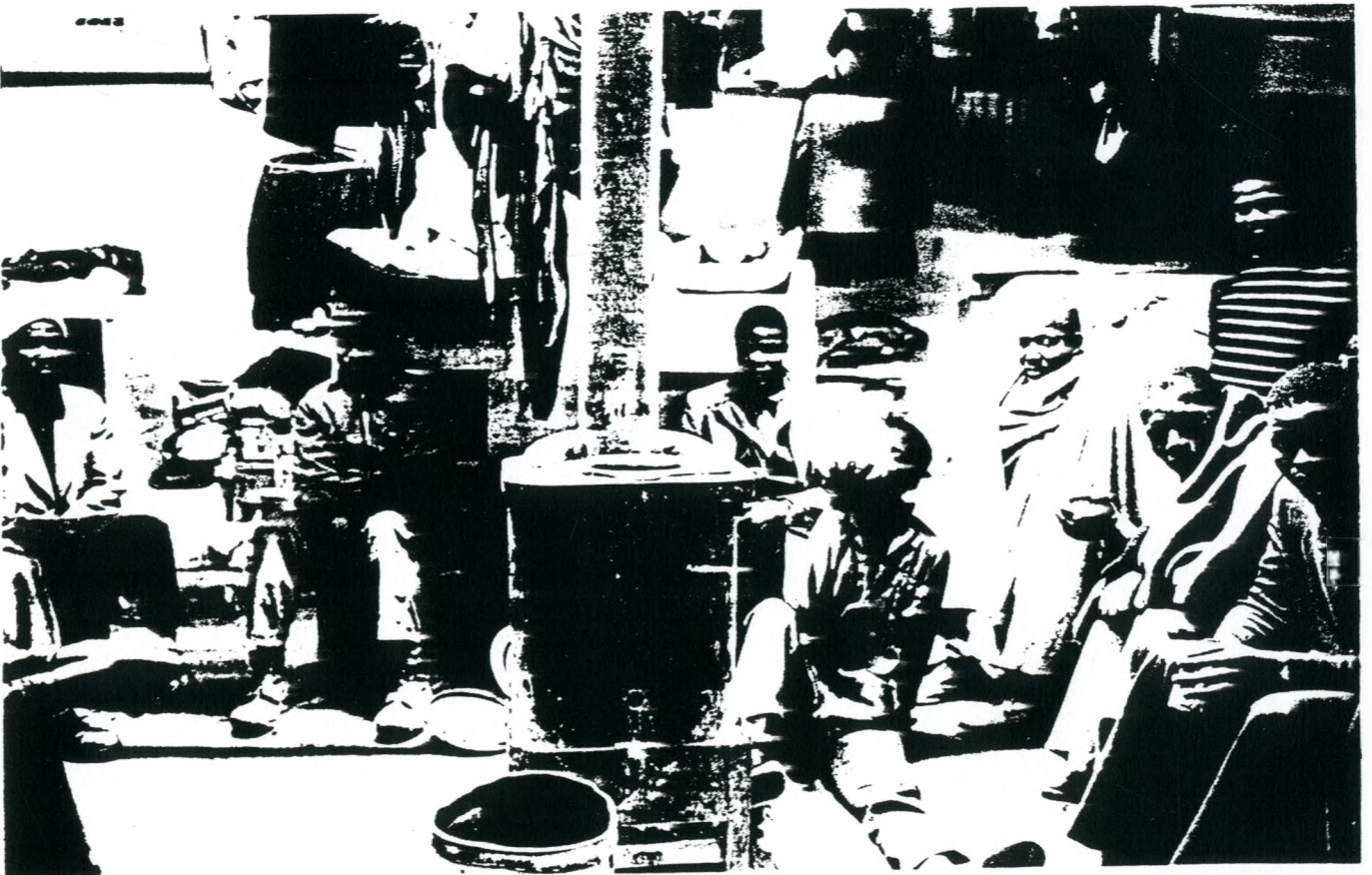




Many years ago:



Today:





Today:







## 2. Workers organise



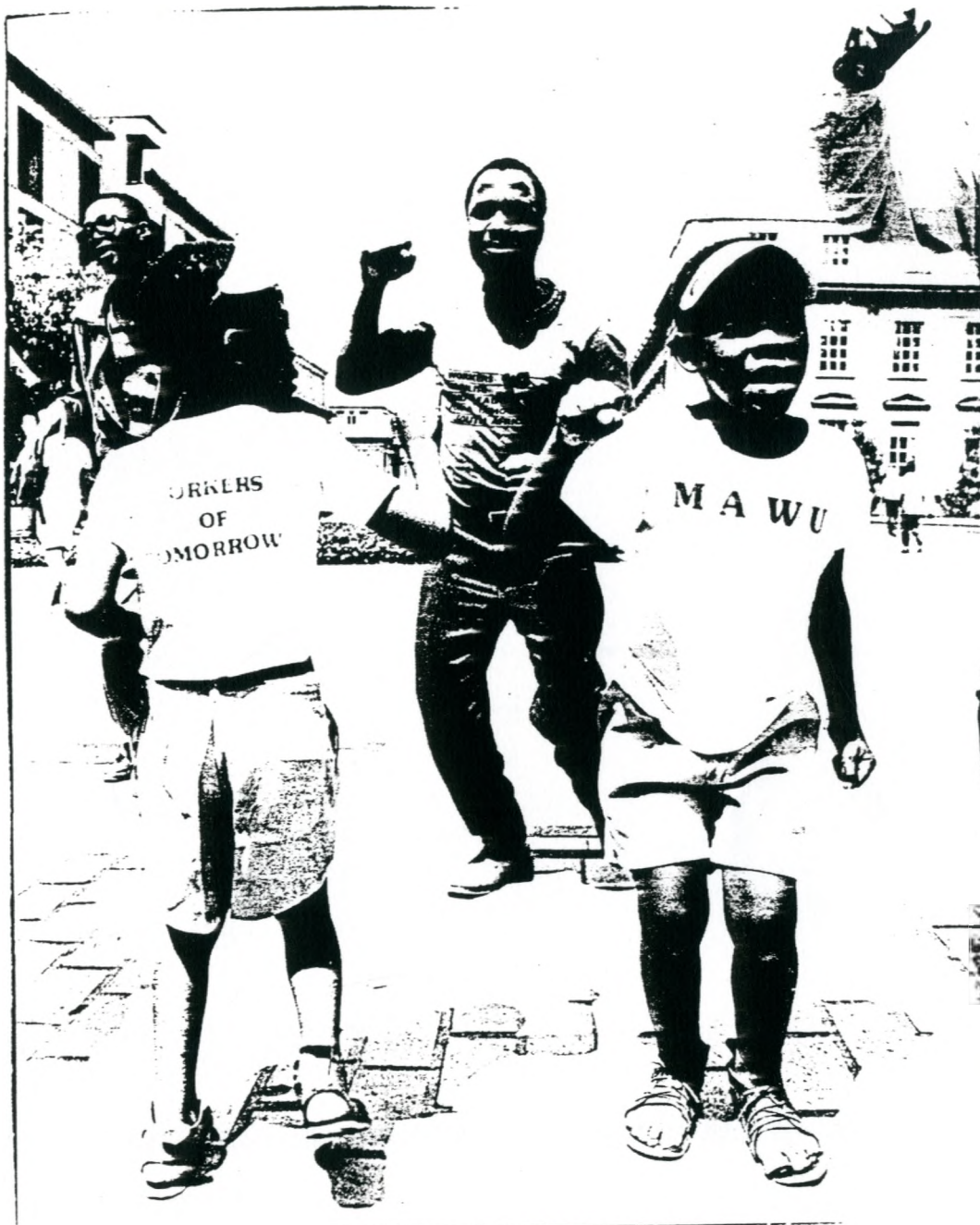


Organising in the '50s: Sactu organisers address workers through a factory fence



Today:









*Members at a Local general meeting in the Western Cape.*





*Workers celebrate at the inaugural congress of COSATU in December 1985.*



### 3. At work

## 4. Worker action





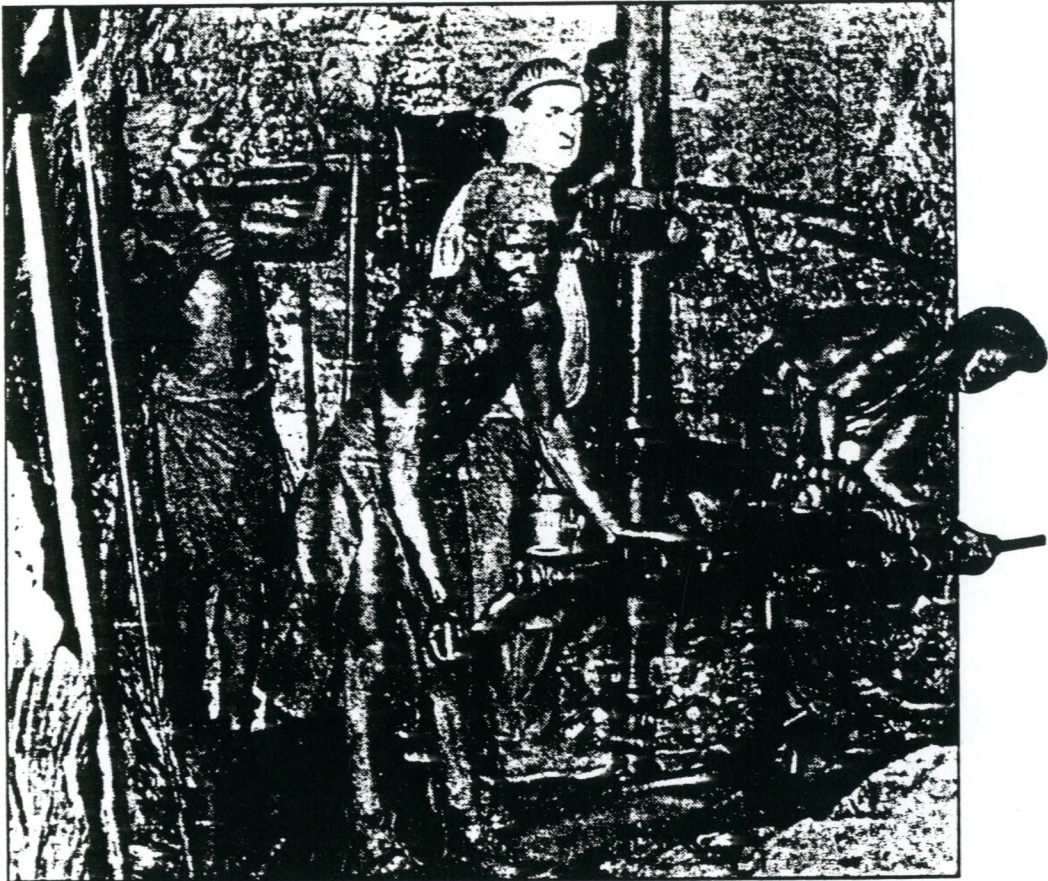
White women working in clothing factory in the 1930s





Black women workers in clothing factory in 1980s



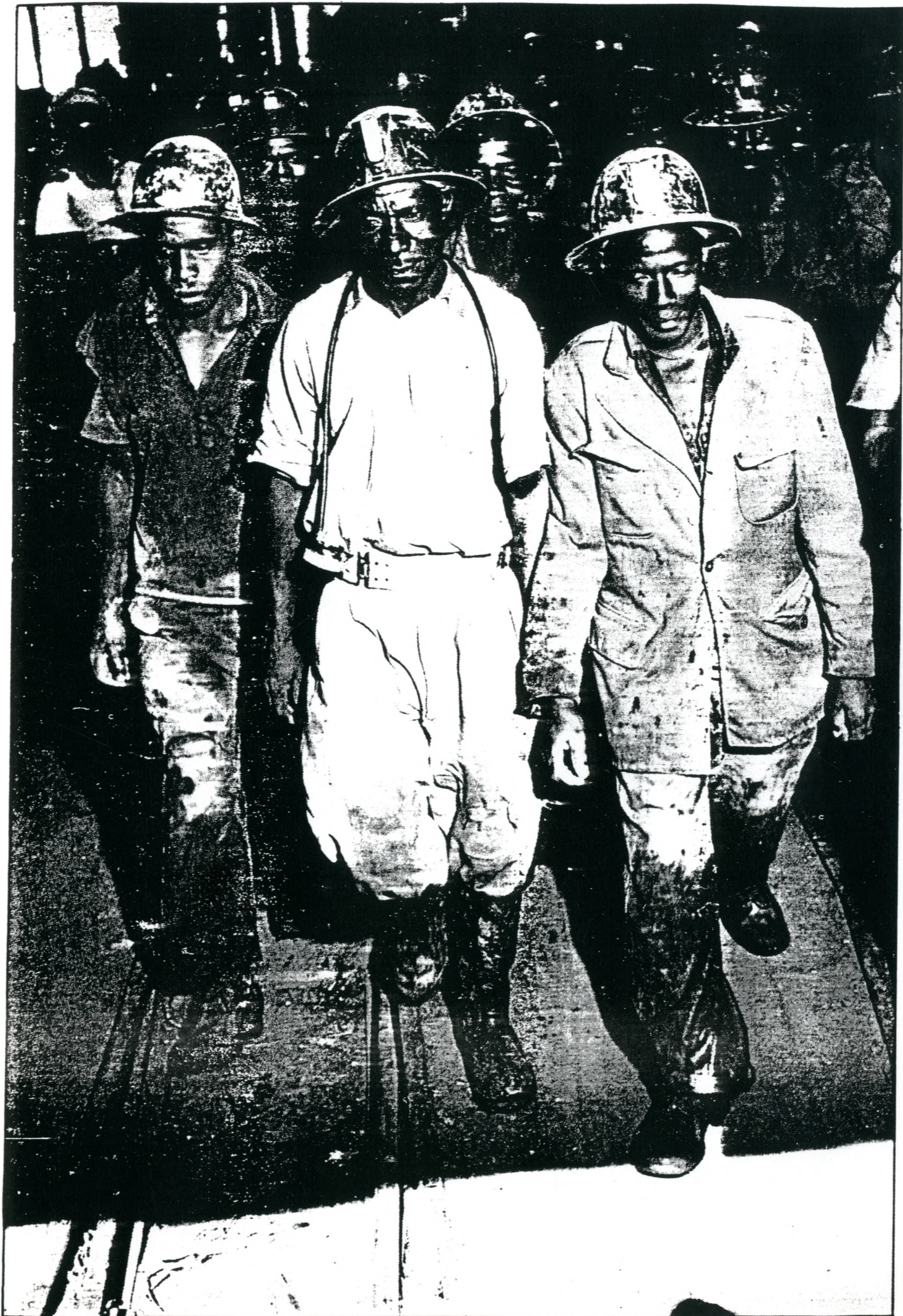


÷Mine workers many years ago



Mine workers today













Working in a clothing factory (Johannesburg, 1984)

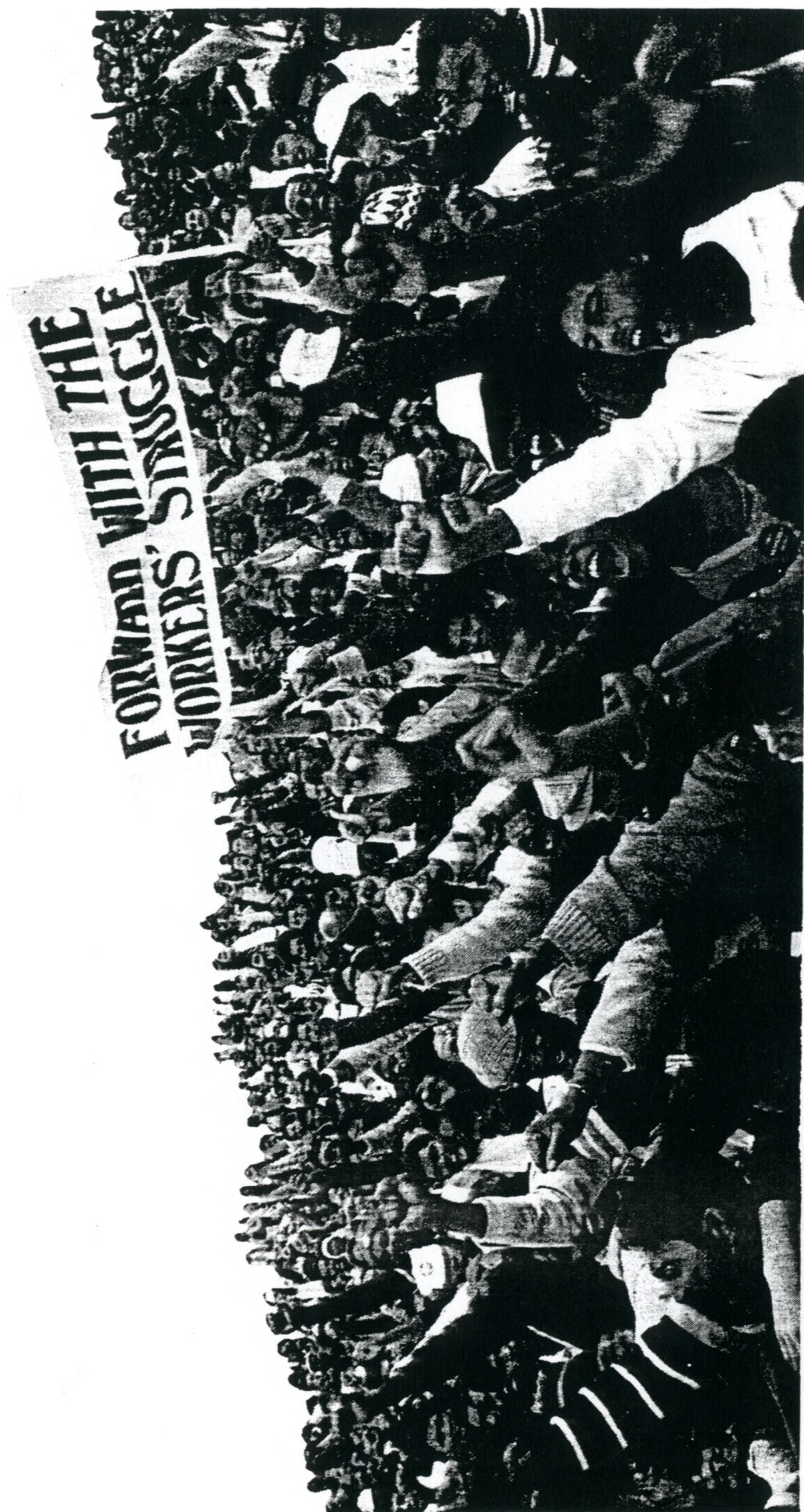
#### 4. Worker action



*Groups of unemployed workers can be seen in front of many factories in South Africa.*



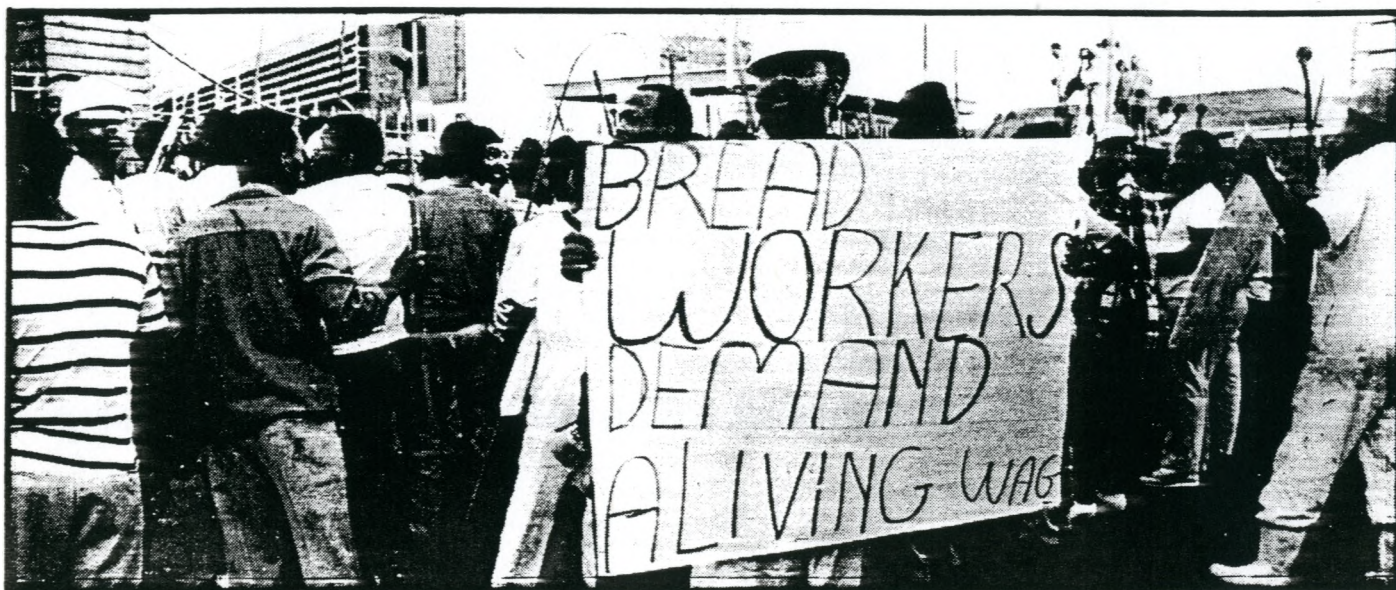








Sarmcol workers - their dismissal provoked mass stayaways in Howick and Pietermaritzburg



Bread workers take over a Durban bakery in their fight for a living wage. When the bosses closed the canteen, workers' families brought food to the gates.









*Durban workers take to the streets during the massive strike wave of 1973*

*Solidarity among black meat workers in Cape Town remained strong throughout their strike, May to August 1980*







The worker militancy which emerged during the war period was one of the forces which revitalised the ANC

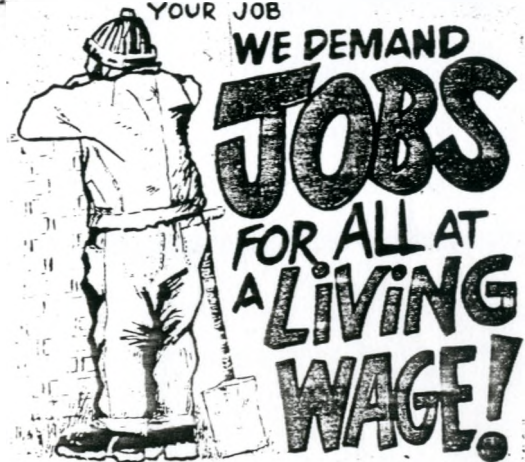






## ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED?

- 1 DID YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU WORKED FOR 3 YEARS AND MORE. YOU CAN GET BENEFITS FOR 1 YEAR?
- 2 DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN APPEAL AGAINST DECISIONS?
- 3 DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN GET DEATH BENEFITS?
- 4 GET YOUR BLUECARD WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR JOB



# **PART THREE:**

## **Additional Readings**

---

### **Guide to the Additional Readings**

#### **A. WORKERS STRUGGLES FROM THE 1920s TO THE 1950s**

1. Extracts from: "Freedom From Below" up to p. 153
2. Labour History Group Books: The ICU
  - The 1922 White Mineworkers' Strike
  - Workers at War
  - Garment Workers Unite
  - Asinamali!
3. "Max Gordon and African Trade Unionism on the Witwatersrand"
  - Industrial trade unions in the 1930s and 1940s
4. "The Workers' Demands" and "The Freedom Charter and the Working Class "

#### **B. WORKERS' STRUGGLE FROM THE 1950s TO THE PRESENT**

1. Extracts from "Freedom from Below!", from p. 117 to end
2. Labour History Group Books: Asinamali!
  - Durban Strikes!



# STORY OF NOMVULA - EXTRACT FROM "WORKING WOMEN"

I've been doing night work for about twenty years, if I'm not mistaken.

Now I'm cleaning an office building. I start work at six o'clock or half past three. There are sixty of us in the different office buildings. In my building we are four.

That work is not good for a woman. When we knock off it is dangerous to go in the street. There are so many tsotsis. And there's no transport. So we have to try and sleep till morning, and there's nowhere to sleep. In the daytime it's also hard to sleep because sometimes it's hot, and there's a lot of noise in the location.

The people leave those offices very dirty. There's paper everywhere, and sometimes even cigarettes on the floor. It's dirty, that is why we work the whole night. And we've got to clean the toilets as well.

Each one of us has a whole floor to do, and that floor is big.

Every night I clean in the same way. You must start with emptying the dustbins and ashtrays. Then you dust. After that you Hoover the carpets with the machine. And there's a huge big buffing machine for the floors. On Fridays you must put polish in the toilets, and on the staircase and furniture. Friday is too much work.

Those machines are so heavy. Sometimes you have terrible backache and your hands are tired. They're machines for men really.

When you've finished your work you go downstairs to wash the dusting rags and clean the machines. Once we've finished we wash ourselves and we sleep there until half past five.

We sleep in our changing rooms. The place is sometimes very cold. There's no carpet on the floor - only tiles. You just take cardboard boxes and sleep on the floor. Sometimes you sit in the chair and you sleep sitting like this, because it's cold on the floor. Or you turn on the hot plate to warm the room.

After sleeping, we wash ourselves again and we walk to the station. It's still dangerous then, but if we sleep till half past seven we reach Soweto at nine o'clock, and that's too late. People with children have to be there to prepare food for them and help them get ready for school. In winter you know you must come and make sure the children have got warm jerseys and all that. I am luckier because my mother does that job for me. I just have to go home and sleep.

So we get home at seven o'clock or half past seven. Then I sleep at about half past eight. At midday I wake up because I must make the fire, and cook. Then I must wash myself and prepare to catch a two o'clock bus which takes me to the station. The station is too far, and the trains are few at that time of day. If I miss my bus, I am late at work.

I used to live with my mother in Meadowlands. It was a two-roomed house and I've got my own four children and my brother's children as well. We were nine altogether.

The house was too small. We were sleeping from the kitchen to the dining room. It was not comfortable for us, sleeping on the floor.

Now it's better because we've got our place - my husband and I. It's a backyard room. We pay R60 a month. It's too much for only a one-roomed house.

My children stay at my mother's. I try to go every weekend to see my children and take them some food. I miss them, but I've got no choice because they can't sleep there alone at night. You see, my husband is also working at night. He's a security guard in the same company as me.

This job makes me sick. You've got sore eyes and you've got headaches all the time because you don't sleep full hours.

We're taking tablets - like Disprin and Combral - so that we don't sleep. Because you can't work when you are feeling sleepy.

The tablets aren't healthy, but what can we do because we've got headaches and sore feet from standing all night, and backache from scrubbing - going up and down like that. And you've got tension, you feel dizzy, you don't know how you are. That's why you take tablets.

Sometimes we just feel like leaving. But we've got no choice. If we could get easier jobs, we'd do it. But there's no work in South Africa. We must pay rent, we must feed our children. That's why we do night shift!

I joined the union in 1981 and I became a shop steward in 1983. I joined because our bosses didn't pay. And if you made a small mistake they would kick you out of the job.

Our bosses, you know, when I look at them I see they are in South Africa for money. They don't care about us. They care about their jobs and money.

They should provide transport for us at night, but they can't because they are so greedy about money.

But we were so happy because our union tries. They've helped us to get maternity rights. They've made them buy tea for us to drink at work. They've made them to buy hot plates and kettles. Before the union was in, there was no table, no chairs, no changing rooms. Now we've got all these things.

It's hard for us night workers to go to union meetings. But we go because we enjoy it, and it helps us. But it's hard because we don't sleep.

You know, we like our union. It makes us brave.

The position of women workers is too heavy, with many things.

The first thing: say you are a woman and you are looking for a job. When you reach a factory, you find the induna there and you ask him. If you like the job the induna will tell you that you must sleep with him before you get that job.

And you've got no choice. You want to work and your children are starving in Soweto. So, some women sleep with those men. Some women sleep with the bosses because they want more money, or easier work. They do it because they want to live, not because they're mad or what.

It's sick, all that.

# EXTRACTS FROM "A WORKING LIFE: CRUEL BEYOND BELIEF" BY ALFRED TEMBA QABULA

## **FIRST EXTRACT:**

On the 3rd of February 1964 I set foot on a train for the first time. I was going to Carltonville, promised a job plumbing.

The following morning (my cousin and I) went to work. Work started at seven in the morning. I had to wait for the manager to get his approval to work there and to see whether I was satisfied with the conditions set down by the firm. Minutes ticked away slowly. I was eager to see myself working. In fact there were also other people waiting for the manager, looking for a job.

At nine o'clock work stopped, but still no manager appeared. It was tea time. It lasted until 9.15. Work resumed.

I was struck by the way work was done there. It was unlike the way we worked back home. People here worked at a very fast pace. Sweat was pouring down their half-naked bodies. They were wearing nothing from the waist up. Some were building houses, other were pouring cement for the foundation. Some were doing the roofing and other were doing the job I was to do, plumbing.

They worked in a very determined manner. I wandered around all the departments looking carefully at the work carried out in each one. There was a nasty job where concrete was mixed. The sun was hot. The black workers, from the ground floor to the third, were pushing wheelbarrows filled to the brim, along planks that looked so unsafe. I felt as if I was dreaming. I was so scared.

Suddenly, a man who was pushing a wheelbarrow fainted. Other workers rushed to him with a water pipe and poured water all over his body. They also used an air pipe. When he came to his senses they took him to a cooler place.

This incident did not affect the way people were working. They were still being hurried as if it wasn't worth noticing. The foreman kept on shouting: "Kom muntus. Mina funa phelisa lo lilep today, hay tomorrow wena yiswakhale. Muntus mina funa we vuka ayifika yifalapha msebenzi kamina". (This is 'fanaklo' - roughly meaning: "Come on Muntus. I want to finish the slab today, not tomorrow do you hear? Muntus I want you to wake up, not to come and die here, in my work.")

## **SECOND EXTRACT:**

At this time conditions were very bad for the workers at Dunlop. They were chased away from work daily.

There was one man, Mr Makhathini, who was liked for his dedication to work at Dunlop. Trouble started for him when we returned after going home for Good Friday, in April 1976. He was getting old, not producing as big a score as before. He was often called and asked whether he still wanted to work at Dunlop. He was made to sign because his production was low, despite the fact that he repeatedly told them that he was not feeling well. Eventually he was admitted to hospital. When he returned to Dunlop, he discovered that he had been written off and he was only given money after a long time.

From that time onwards I hated the Dunlop factory. It used people very hard and then, when they had no strength to produce more, dumped them like rubbish. I realised that I would eventually be in the same position as Mr Makhathini.

I hoped I could do something to protect myself from the cruel hands at Dunlop, because they fired many people who were hurt at work.

I remember one man who was hit by a Fork Lift Truck. He was told to come back daily to sit at the entrance, and was given nothing to alleviate his pain. His legs were swollen and he could not even use a stick to walk. I asked him why he did not go to King Edward Hospital. He did and was admitted immediately. On his return he was scolded and fired. There was nothing I could do.

I tried to think of ways to escape all this misery but could find no solution.



We started to discuss the bad conditions of work at Dunlop and the manner in which people were fired daily without any reason. One of the workers suggested that we join a trade union. He told me that the offices were at 125 Gale Street. We all agreed to visit the office, to tell them about our working conditions, and to ask about the trade union movement.

# STORY OF EPSIE ZONDO - EXTRACTS TAKEN FROM "WORKING LIFE 1886 - 1940" BY LULI CALLINICOS

(Epsie Zondo, born Ndaba in the Ermelo district in 1911, was the child of a farm worker.)

My father worked on a farm. He had a few cattle and ploughed mealies and mabela. I never went to school. My eldest brother he go to school and he got lost till today. My father built the house we were living in. Of stones, and an iron roof. I was very small but my eldest sister was working on the farm and my brothers too.

(Then her father and mother were divorced, and her mother moved with her daughters to Pimville. There, Epsie had to help support her family.)

I started to work in Johannesburg when I was about thirteen years old. My wages was twelve shillings, what you call today R1.20. A month. Some friends took me to the job (in Braamfontein), my mother's friend. I was very frightened. I used to run away and go home and they took me back to work again.

I was looking after the baby and they used to teach me how to clean the house - must scrub and put polish. I didn't understand English, I didn't understand Afrikaans.

I married John Zondo, a Zulu. He used to work in the shop when we get married. He pay lobola to my brother.

(After she married she carried on working as a domestic and living in a backyard)

I used to wash for the room. Madam say you must wash and iron but that means to say you pay for the room.

The man who married me, I was pulling like an ox; no rest. Till this today, I'm pulling hard. I used to do the washing and ironing for two madams a day to push this four daughters to school...The father couldn't pay a farthing for these four daughters. He was working. He gave me nix.

Myself, I'm sick. I've been sick for four years. My husband, when he come from work he used to bath Janet, used to rinse napkins, because I was sick for four years. After that I start to feel better.

And I was helping the man, he said I must help him. "After you help me, my wife, you'll sit down till this today."

He used to wake me up in the morning for the bus. "Your bus will leave without you." I used to take a bus to Parkmore. There was only one bus in the morning and one bus five o'clock. If you lost this one, you won't go to work. He used to wake me and he used to stay at home. I must go to work. Oooh, I don't want to think about that man. Ja.

I had two babies before I was married. The father he run away. He was Levy Mbatha. Also a Zulu. He promised me that he is going to pay lobola, but hide away that he's got a wife, he's a married man. I was working in Malvern, Polly Street. So he leave me there.

The baby was crying all the time, and the madam couldn't keep me. I can't cover the work, can't finish all my work. So I leave that work. I find the room also in Malvern. The baby was crying. And then that madam also says she couldn't keep me, they can't sleep, the baby's crying the whole night and the room was near the house, you see. I leave that room because the madam couldn't sleep.

She said, "Epsie my girl, I can't help it because the master's working and he can't sleep. He's going to work in the morning."

So I try to find another room. The while I try to find another room, just can't find it easy. When the sun set where must I go to sleep with the baby? One day I climb on the tree with the baby, I tie the baby onto me with straps.

Before I was married I had two children - two girls. After I was married I had nine. Eleven children - only four alive. They all died. I had five boys and six girls, but seven died.

I used to have baby and die, baby and die - all this. The time I came to Alexandra five babies died. Sometimes they used to stay two months, three months, they die.

(Epsie described her work as a domestic servant)

Start half past six in the morning. We used to work all day. No day off. Lunch you eat it in the kitchen. Just when you finish eating you start the work. Finish at seven o'clock. You do the washing and ironing; there's no washing machine. No polishing machine. You scrub the floors and you come put the polish, rub it off again. Thursdays you do the windows, right around the house.

(After her first employer left Johannesburg, Epsie got a job in Jeppe.)

There I was clever. I was no more mampara (laughs). I work long time there two or three years for that madam. She was good for me. Afrikaans. Ooh, she's so good! When she's go out to bioscope or something like a party I must stay in. When she come she find me sleeping on the floor, she take a blanket. She says, "You mustn't go to the room, Epsie, you sleep here because you fast asleep. Sleep till tomorrow morning."

When they were having dinner I used to have the same what they eat. She was paying me R3 a month. (When she was cooking) she used to call me to come and see. "Some time, Epsie, you'll cook - come and see what madam's doing." I used to peel. Whatever you want me to peel, I must peel.

Once a week, Sunday afternoon, you get off - after they had lunch, wash the dishes, and then you can take the train and go home. Come in the morning, early. You see your mother only two, three hours. And you sleep and in the morning you get up, take the train out.

(After she married the hard work continued)

Ooh, I was fighting for my four daughters.... Ja, I used to have a petticoat, you see, a mealie-meal bag. Ja, And even for my pantie, I cut that mealie-meal bag and make a pantie. Push my four daughters to school.

In Kensington it was empty that time, no houses. I start to make beer there, African beer. I sell for the boys. One boy was jealous because I was selling a lot, you see. He used to come with other boys when they coming to drink at my home, see. And he get jealous and he call the police.

And the madam didn't know, master didn't know, because Kensington used to be big houses, your room used to be far away from the big house. They didn't know I'm doing something like that, but the day he call the police then the police tell them.

(Epsie then became a laundrywoman)

I used to wash there, at the madam's house. Sometimes two madams a day. I used to wash in Rosebank, take a bus to town. I used to have another washing in town.

I've got no time to pray because I always think of my troubles at my back. At my home there's no mealie-meal. There's no coal to make fire, there's no 35 cents for bread, there's no blanket to cover myself and to cover my sons and daughters. The winter is in but I'm not ready (with) the blankets because I've no money to buy. Ja, I'm only thinking about what can help me. Nothing else. When I think to pray I always disappoint myself because I think, "Oh, I've no coal at home and it's so cold. I have no mealie meal. What we going to eat and I've got no piece of meat."

I always think I must stay in Church. I might have a rest somewhere because they say there's heaven where you get rest. Because here I didn't get rest. All of my life. No. I didn't have a rest in this country.



## STORY OF AGNES THULARE - EXTRACT FROM "WORKING WOMEN"

For two year I've been living in Soweto and selling fruit and vegetables. There is a group of us who sell together. We don't sell in one place - we move around.

I stay in a shack in some people's backyard.

My family are not here with me. They are in Bushbuckridge. My three children are there also.

I don't have a licence to sell fruit and vegetables but I think you can get them from the local West Rand Board office. Once we went there to apply and they told us, "You don't qualify for permits because your passes are not from Johannesburg." So I gave up trying.

I buy my fruit and vegetables three times a week. On Tuesdays and Fridays I catch a train to Faraday to buy things. On Wednesdays I go to the Kliptown market. I like to compare the different prices. That way I am able to save myself a few cents. Every cent counts a lot.

Business is better at the end of the month. But there are so many of us selling the same kind of vegetables that we don't make such a fortune. Not all days are the same, but on a good day I make R16.

What can we do? We are all very poor. As long as we can eat, pay our rent and send some money home to our people, then all is well.

Back home in Bushbuckridge there is no money at all. It's hard life out there. Even the cows are dying because of the drought. And there is no food.

Apart from my children there are five in the family. But my brothers and sisters are unemployed. They help in the fields, but that doesn't mean that they have a job. My parents are now too old to work. They don't even have a pension. So they depend on me for support.

Selling vegetables is strenuous work, but there is nothing better I can do. The only other job I've had was in a factory. It was near Sabie. I worked on a machine that cuts wood. We didn't get enough money - money is scarce in the country. All we got was R22 a month. I worked there for a year. Then my employer called me to the office and told me there was no more work. That's why I left the job.

I can't say that I like this job, or that I don't like it. At least I know that every cent I make is mine. If you work for a white employer he may offer you a new uniform when you have worked well, instead of giving you extra money. I call that cheating.

If I could get a better job I wouldn't hesitate to leave. But my reference book isn't right for Johannesburg - so I can't find a better way of earning a living.