FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions

September 1982

Turmoil in Eastern Cape Crucial struggle for living wage Washer Chispute

THERE is still no end in sight to the three month old dispute in the automobile manufacturing industry in the Eastern Cape, which according to union spokesmen is one of the most significant industrial disputes

in South Africa in recent times.

Over 17 000 workers, accounting for almost 45 per cent of the workforce in the industry, have been involved in stoppages, go-slows and lockouts at Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen.

Worker action at the three companies has resulted in over 20 000 people having to stop work. The strike at GM was its first ever in South Africa, and it was also the first time workers had taken joint action at all three motor assembly plants in the Eastern Cape.

DEMAND

The dispute was sparked off when the employers rejected a wage demand of R3,50 an hour submitted by the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU).

Employers have claimed that such an increase would add between R800 and R1 000 to the prices of their cars and that all the Eastern Cape plants would have to be closed as a result.

But the union has rejected all claims that the wage demand is unrealistic, and has called on the companies to prove their statements by releasing their balance sheets and management salary scales as well as figures showing what percentage of the total wage bill is paid to management and hourly paid workers.

Until now the companies have not released this information.

INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL

An important effect of the dispute has been the collapse of the Industrial Council for the Eastern Province Motor Assembly Industry. NAAWU withdrew from the council last month because employers and the white SA Iron, Steel and Allied Workers' Union voted to refer the dispute to arbitration.

At the time, NAAWU's general secretary, Fred Sauls, announced that it was withdrawing to avoid compulsory arbitration. He said the union was not against the Industrial Council system as such and would be willing to re-enter the council once the present dispute had been resolved.

However, he said it was an important principle that disputes could not be solved by an outside third party and had to be resolved

by the two parties involved through the process of collective bargaining.

This statement has come at a time when many academic institutions and employers are pushing compulsory arbitration clauses in union agreements and NAAWU's stance is expected to provide a clear lead to other unions.

FORD'S ATTITUDE

Another important effect of the dispute has been the complete change in the way Ford has handled industrial disputes.

During the dispute over the dismissal of Thozamile Botha three years ago and the more recent dispute with MACWUSA, the union which has emerged as a rival to NAAWU at Ford, management treated the strikers with kid gloves, allowing all to return to work and recognising MACWUSA.

Ford's Fred Ferreira overnight became a showpiece personnel manager, preaching tolerance and understanding and a willingness to negotiate reasonably.

This reasonableness has now disappeared.

On July 26, the company refused to open its gates, effectively locking out workers who wanted to return.

This was reversed only after NAAWU threatened to take legal action.

Ford later took advantage of the strike to retrench 507 workers, most of them from the NAAWU strongholds in the Neave and truck plants

The union has won an agreement from Ford to take them all back as vacancies arise.

MACWUSA

MACWUSA kept surprisingly quiet during the dispute. It has no negotiating rights at this stage and its role as a minority union has been to snipe from the sidelines.

While the union made almost no public statements, its members broke the strike in the Ford engine and Cortina plants by continuing to work after NAAWU members had stopped.

They were forced to stop work only after the companies decided to close down because of shortages of parts from NAAWU-organised areas.

Ford workers at general meetings expressed anger about this. "How can they support management at a time when their wages are also being fought for", one worker said.

MACWUSA's only public state-

ment was in support of NAAWU's withdrawal from the industrial council. This support was later withdrawn when the union said it may return to the council.

INCREASE

NAAWU has pressed for inplant bargaining as a way of settling the dispute. Employers were invited to start bargaining on an indivudal basis but they later rejected this during an informal meeting with the union.

They also suggested an interim wage increase to R2,20 to "take the heat out of the situation".

NAAWU referred this to its general membership, which rejected the interim increase.

The employers then informed NAAWU that they would unilaterally implement the increase, and invited the union to negotiate outside the industrial council together with the Iron and Steel Workers' Union and MACWUSA.

The unilateral increase and the employers' decision about whom they wanted to negotiate with was condemned by NAAWU and Fred Sauls said it would increase the tensions in the Eastern Cape.

The union recently submitted proposals to the various companies.

Another important development has been the attacks on the union by employers, public offers bearers such as the Mayor of Port Elizabeth and prominent "community" leaders such as Rev Allan Hendrickse.

He reportedly accused the union leadership of being irresponsible and misleading its members and said workers were abusing the strike as a weapon and did not have the support of the larger community.

The local press has also run a

The local press has also run a smear campaign against the union, and claimed that a recent decision by VW to postpone a R100 million extension to its factory was due to the labour situation.

This decision made banner headlines in Port Elizabeth and the newspapers all implied it was the union's fault. But in an official statement, VW said the decision had been taken entirely on business grounds and was related to the downturn in the economy.

A union spokesman has said:

"The propaganda campaign has hotted up because it is the first time a large union in an important industrial sector has taken employers on over an economically significant issue – a living wage and the right to determine what that should be".



THREE Ford workers examine their pay slips on the say the company retrenched 507 workers. towards labour disputes has changed markedly during the present conflict in the Eastern Cape.

Union spokesmen say Ford's attitude

FOSATU's Central Committee has mandated FOSATU's office bearers to continue discussions with likeminded unions in order to develop greater unity among all oppressed workers in South Africa.

This step has been taken after FOSATU clearly stated its commitment to greater unity at its national congress earlier this year.

PROGRAMME

The committed congress FOSATU to a non-racial workers' movement based on democratic participation from the factory floor upwards, and also spelled out a

Setback to unity - but talks will continue

programme for working towards

The Central Committee has now reaffirmed FOSATU's commitment to this resolution, despite the failure of the unity talks held in Port Elizabeth in June.

A report presented to the Central

Committee on the talks made it clear that certain unions, among them MACWUSA, SAAWU, GWUSA, SATAWU, and the BMWU, had met before the meeting and decided to raise issues which they knew would disrupt the talks.

The discussions at the summit

meeting on unity held in Johannesburg in May were ignored.

According to the report, the discussions at the meeting in May had been fruitful and considerable progress had been made. However, at the June meeting, some unions insisted on returning to issues

knew would divide unions at the

'SERIOUS SETBACK'

discussed at the unity meeting held

in Cape Town last year, which they

In a statement, the Central Committee has said it believes that the actions of these unions have dealt a serious setback to the possibility of unity among South Africa's oppressed workers.
"This setback has occurred

because a minority of unions have refused to compromise on issues which are not seen by representatives of the vast majority of organised workers as obstacles to unity,' it has said

Fosatu pledges support

FOSATU has pledged its full support to the General Workers' Union in its struggle for recognition against South African Transport Services (SATS) in the Port Elizabeth and East London docks.

In a resolution adopted at its meeting in July, FOSATU's Central Committee also called on SATS to immediately open discussions with the union.

MAJORITY UNION

The GWU has already established itself as the majority union in most major ports in the country.

The stevedores organised by the union, for whom it has won substantial increases and better working conditions, work closely together with workers who load and unload ships for SATS.

Eventually, these stevedores began organising the non-unionised dock workers, and when the GWU gained majority membership in the Port Elizabeth and East London docks it approached SATS for recognition.

Until now, however, SATS has refused to meet with the GWU. It has stated that it already negotiates with approved staff associations and will not deal with "outside"

At the same time when this refusal was made known, facilities permitting the union to collect subscriptions on the docks were with-

HARASSED

Workers were also questioned by the railways police and the union has stated that some of its members have been harassed and victimised.

The dispute has attracted national and international attention. The Internation Transport Federation, which represents dock workers all over the world, has already written to SATS calling on it to recognise

Some employers in the Eastern Cape have also called on the SATS to open negotiations, as any dispute in the docks will obviously affect the supply of parts and equipment to plants all over the country.

STATEMENT

In its statement of support, FOSATU said workers will no longer tolerate "sweetheart" unions like the unions SATS consult with.

The days of paternalism are over, it said, and pointed out that the attitude of SATS is even out of line with Government policy

FOSATU has requested all affiliates and shop stewards' councils to discuss this dispute so that they will be ready for any future support action which may be required.



JOHN Hlela, a cotton worker in Hammarsdale, was fired last year after he contracted brown lung disease.

Now, the NUTW has helped him to get proper medical treatment and has filed a compensation claim for him. His full story is told in the new booklet on cotton dust issued by the union.

to GWU Health campaign in cotton factories

THE National Union of Textile Workers has started a national campaign among its members against a lung disease caused by cotton dust.

Thousands of workers all over the world have died of this disease, which is called "brown lung"

Up to now, very little has been done to protect workers in South Africa against this disease, union spokesman say. For this reason, the NUTW together with the FOSATU health and safety committee decided to publish a booklet telling workers about the disease.

The booklet, "Cotton Dust Kills', has been written by Dr Neil White of the Health Care Trust and published for FOSATU by the Centre for Allied Legal Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand.

BRAITEX

The campaign started at Braitex, a cotton factory in Spring, and Dr White was brought up from Cape Town to do tests on the cotton workers' lungs. Management refused to allow the union's doctor to do tests in the factory and when the company heard that FOSATU was going to do tests on the workers, it decided to get its own doctor.

He agreed to do the tests for the company without contacting the NUTW or the workers.

However, he has been rejected by the workers. As one worker said: "Who does this doctor think he is? He can't come and do tests on me without my permission. We don't know this doctor and we are suspicious of him. Why doesn't he contact our union?

PETITION

The workers have decided to sign a petition telling management that they will only have more tests done on them if the union agrees to accept the doctor involved.

Meanwhile, Dr White has held clinics in the township and has tested the lungs of most of the workers. The results have been send to one of the best lung specialists in the country to see if there is any brown lung in the factory.

The booklet spells out six demands shop stewards should make to safeguard the health of workers in cotton factories. They are:

Workers' lungs must be tested.

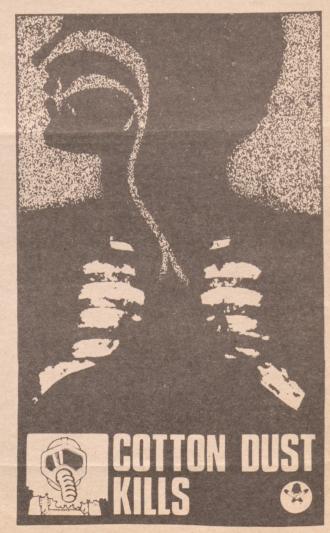
 Only the union's doctor should do these tests. In this way, workers will be sure that they will be told the results and that they will not be used against them.

• Dust levels in the factory must be measured and shop stewards must be told what the results are. The union should also be involved in taking these measurements.

 Efficient exhaust ventilation machines to reduce dust in the factory must be provided. The union should provide expert advice on

• The machines and factory should be cleaned with vacuum cleaners and not with compressed air and by sweeping.

 Workers affected by brown lung should be moved to dust-fre departments, and they must not be dismissed.



THIS poster is being distributed by the NUTW as part of its campaign to protect workers against cotton dust.

Detention without trial condemned

FOSATU has once again strongly condemned detention without trial and has called on the authorities to immediately release all detainees.

In a resolution adopted at its meeting last month, FOSATU's Central Committee also called on the authorities to immediately repeal all laws providing for the indefinite detention and solitary confinement of people, and immediately cease the torture of detai-

The Committee expressed its

rity legislation to intimidate and restrict the freedom of association of persons in the struggle for a just, human and democratic society.

It also added: "The Committee does not accept that the South African security legislation is based on the rule of law and therefore cannot accept that the South African security legislation is based on the on the rule of law and therefore cannot accept that any decision by the judiciary based on the security legislation is just and fair.

THE effects of South Africa's close relations with Taiwan are now being felt by workers in the knitting industry.

According to knitting companies, Prime Minister P.W. Botha's visit to Taiwan last year has resulted in Taiwanese knitwear being allowed into South Africa without any customs duties being applied.

Taiwanese knitwear is consequently being sold in South Africa at lower prices than locally produced knitting so that workers in the knitting industry are being retrenched on a large scale.

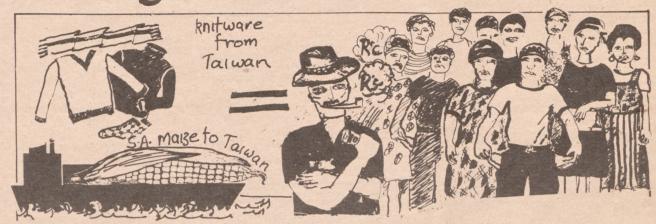
HOSTILE

Spokesman for the National Union of Textile Workers say that trade union organisation is even more difficult in Taiwan than in South Africa because of the hostile attitude of employers and the government there.

Consequently, workers in Taiwan are paid even lower wages than the miserable wages in South African knitting, and Taiwanese knitwear can be sold more cheaply.

One of the reasons why Taiwanese knitwear is allowed in without customs duties being charged appears to be that South African maize is being exported to Taiwan

In comes the Knitwear, out got the workers...



on a large scale.

NUTW spokesman feel that the black worker in the knitting industry is being made to suffer in order to increase the bank balances of South African farmers.

Because of Taiwanese competition and the present recession, workers are being laid off throughout the knitting industry. In the NUTW, workers have been laid off at Regina Carpets, SA Fabrics, Linofra, the Pan group, AA Fabrics, Gregory Hosiery, Safnit and Progress Knitting.

With all these retrenchments, NUTW is fighting a difficult battle to protect its members but some progress has been made.

At AA Fabrics, employers have agreed to re-employ eighty retrenched workers by October.

SEVERANCE PAY

At Gregory Hosiery, employers have agreed to short time of three days a week and no retrenchments. At Ginofra, SA Fabrics, Progress

Knitting and Regina Carpets, severance pay has been won, even though two of these companies initially objected to it on principle.

At Linofra and Progress, the LIFO principle (first in, last out) was accepted and Linofra has also guaranteed to offer any new jobs to the retrenched workers first.

New struggle

against

works councils

WORKERS in many factories are reporting that their employers are trying to force works councils onto them, so as to avoid true union recognition.

The problem is being experienced particularly by the metal and chemical unions in the Transvaal.

At Shell's Cera plant in Boksburg, it is rumoured that the company is only willing to grant union recognition through works councils.

A works council is a body elected internally in the factory and not in a union election. Management wants everyone to sit on it, including managers, clerical staff and salesmen.

NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations which are normally conducted face to face between management and union shop stewards are now intended to take place solely in the works council.

Workers at Cera say it is rediculous to negotiate in a works council with company employees whom they see as part of management on the same side of the table as the production workers in the plant.

Shell argues that it is an open and equal opportunity company where everybody is treated the same. Workers reply that it is nonsense to say that management and workers are treated in the same way, and that the mainly white management and administrative staff have already had far greater opportunities in education and training which the workers have been denied.

Since they start off in the company from unequal positions, workers say, how can the company talk about real equality and joint negotiations?

REFUSED

Workers say management has already called on the workers in the separate departments – not the plant as a whole – to elect representatives to the works council. A number of

departments refused, and according to the CWIU members in the plant, a manager, a Mr Woods, then chose their representatives himself. The workers describe these representatives as mpimpi's.

In a recent FOSATU paper, Bernie Fanaroff, a Transvaal organiser of MAWU, examined the weaknesses of works councils and showed why companies are pushing them so hard.

Like the old liaison committees, he says, works councils are being used to avoid direct union recognition. Companies use them to block direct union representation in the plant.

Management includes representatives of non-unionised members in the works councils, as well as representatives of white workers, who have in many cases acted in opposition to black workers in the past.

WORSE

The system is like the liaison committee system, but worse. Like the liaison committee system, it includes unorganised workers who by definition wish to operate as individuals. They refuse to join unions because they hope that they will personally receive promotion or bonuses if they seem to be on management's side.

All that can come out of this system, Bernie argues, is communication, not collective bargaining. Practically all works council constitutions that he has seen do not allow for negotiations.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives laid down in one widely used constitution in the steel and engineering industry are:

- to resolve grievances
- to create greater commit ment
- to resolve grievances
- to create greater commitment by employees to the objectives of the company
- to improve and maintain plant efficiency, productivity and morale.



NAAWU is continuing its intensive recruiting drive at the BMW plant in Rosslyn, Pretoria, in an effort to gain majority membership and get rid of the works council. Here, new members are signing up.

Works councils, it says, are primarily advisory and consultative bodies and cannot reverse or amend any instruction given by management. Nor can they interfere with disciplinary matters.

Even if works councils did allow for negotiations, says Andrew Zulu, vice-president of FOSATU, they will still have all the weaknesses of liaison committees. There will be few organised workers to support and control their representatives on the council.

In this situation, report-back meetings are unlikely, and management and the representatives of other groups of employees (clerical and administrative) will browbeat worker representatives on the council.

"It makes you wonder why they bothered to change the name," says Andrew.

WIEHAHN REPORT

Part of the answer is given in the Wiehahn report on labour laws on which the government's recent labour reforms were based.

Liaison committees, Wiehahn said, were widely discredited among black workers. The obvious answer to this problem would have been to abolish liaison committees, but Wiehahn proposed that they rather change the name.

What name did he suggest? Works councils, of course.

Committee will regulate agreements

FOSATU has set up a top-level committee to co-ordinate and standardize agreements its affiliated unions negotiate with managements.

This step was taken at the Central Committee meeting held last month.

The committee will consist of the general secretaries of all unions, the FOSATU office bearers and the national education secretary, and will meet every three months.

PRINCIPLES

The agreements sub-committee has been set up because of the need to share information and ideas

about agreements. It will also encourage FOSATU affiliates not to sign agreements which could cause problems for other unions by creating undesirable precedents.

The committee will also try to lay down general principles on which all agreements should be based.

The committee has been formed at a time when employers throughout the country appear to be discussing common agreements.

Unions in different regions have come up against the same clauses proposed by managements, who have also used the same arguments.

WEAKER UNIONS

Many managements are using the same consultants and legal advisers and unions have found that clauses which are rejected by stronger unions are forced on weaker unions elsewhere.

All the unions are then confronted with the argument that they should accept these clauses as they have been accepted by other FOSATU affiliates

It was made clear at the Central Committee meeting that the new

committee will not have the powers to impose decisions on any affiliate. Its role will be to discuss and formulate principles to be followed in agreements and collective bargaining, and to advise whether individual agreements conform to generally accepted FOSATU principles.

FURTHER STEP

The information of the committee is seen as a further step towards FOSATU's goal of evolving an industrial relations system suitable to the aims and needs of emerging majority unions in South Africa.

Thousands strike at Veldspun

A major strike broke out at Veldspun Textiles in Uitenhage early this month when 1 450 out of 1 700 workers downed tools.

According to NUTW officials, the background to the strike is an unhappy story of management bad faith and trade union opportunism.

BARLOW-RAND

Veldspun is owned by Barlow Rand, which takes pride in its "progressive" attitude towards trade unions.

Worker representatives at Veldspun find this claim difficult to believe. When the NUTW originally negotiated its recognition agreement with Veldspun it included a retrenchment clause (LIFO) in its proposal.

Veldspun refused to accept this but said it had never retrenched a single worker for the last ten years. Management suggested that the NUTW hold over negotiations about retrenchment until later so that the agreement could be concluded quickly.

The union agreed, believing that the company was acting in good faith.

Then, some months later, the company retrenched about 25 workers. The NUTW then gave the company another set of retrenchment proposals, which included severance pay.

REFUSED

Veldspun refused to accept this, saying that it was against company policy. However, the union was able to point out that the same group had already agreed on severance pay at Regina. Management said it would look into the matter, but then retrenched more workers.

At this point Veldspun offered to renegotiate the agreement which the NUTW was also dissatisfied with, and suggested this should be done in September. Again NUTW agreed, and again they found out

Barlow-Rand's labour policies exposed

the company was acting in bad faith as at the end of August they retrenched workers once again.

This ultimately caused the strike.

TUCSA UNION

According to the NUTW, it seems likely that the company was encouraged to act in this way by another union in the plant which is affiliated to TUCSA.

Before the strike, NUTW membership stood at 1 100 out of 1 700 workers. The other union, Norman Daniels' Textile Workers' Industrial Union, had 300 to 400 coloured members recruited on a strictly racial basis.

Before it recognised the NUTW, Veldspun demanded that it prove by ballot that it represented over 50 percent of the workers. However, it continued to recognise the TWIU even though it represented less than 20 percent of the workers.

The NUTW suspected that the company was trying to divide the workers along racial lines, and that the TWIU was collaborating with it in this plan.

Recent events, say the NUTW, have shown these suspicions were

When the strike occurred, 250 of TWIU's members almost immediately returned to work. Since then,

its organiser, who until recently was a supervisor in the factory, has been helping to recruit scabs to take the jobs of the striking workers.

MACWUSA

NUTW members compare the attitude of the TUCSA union to that of MACWUSA, whose members have also continued working in the Eastern Cape motor plants while NAAWU's members have been on strike.

However, the divide and rule tactics of Veldspun and its "sweetheart" union have backfired. A hundred and fifty of TWIU's members, includings its leadership, have crossed the floor to join the NUTW and the TWIU has become completely discredited among workers.

If MACWUSA continues to collaborate with management, say FOSATU representatives in Port Elizabeth, it will share the same fate.

Sappi meets pension demands

AFTER long negotiations and two major strikes over the pensions issue, SAPPI management has accepted proposals by the sweet, food and Allied Workers' Union for a major revision of pension fund rules.

In line with FOSATU's resolutions on pensions, SAPPI has agreed to:

Allow employees below grade C in the company to retire at the age of 55 without the company's special consent. The previous retirement age was 63.

• Increase interest on members contributions from 2 percent to 6 percent per year.

• Appoint two worker representatives as additional trustees on the Pension Fund Board of Trustees.

HOUSING LOANS

SAPPI has also agreed to provide interest-free loans of up to R200 a year for six months for school fees (R50 for each child); to provide housing loans up to the value of the members' contributions at building society interest rates payable over 5 years; and to refund up to R600 of members' contributions immediately when they resign. Amounts over R600 require a certificate from the tax authorities which takes longer to obtain.

WELCOMED

Improved death and funeral benefits have also been agreed on.
Union spokesman have welcomed

SAPPI's change of attitude on pensions, although they have expressed disappointment that the membership of the fund has not been made voluntary, as the union wished.

According to the SFAWU, other employers in Natal, particularly in the sugar industry, are negotiating pension fund rules.

Says Jay Naidoo, organiser for the SFAWU: "We hope other employers will take note and realise that pension funds are a legitimate area of negotiations for worker organisations."



FOSATU recently held a general meeting for workers in the Brits area, where FOSATU unions have been growing in strength. The meeting was well attended and was addressed by shop stewards from organised MAWU and NAAWU factories elsewhere in the Transvaal.

First joint council meeting

FOSATU's first joint shop stewards' council, the Transvaal council, recently met for the first time.

Over 400 shop stewards attended, mostly from the Roodepoort, Johannesburg, Katlehong and Elandsfontein locals. Representatives from Benoni, Vereeniging and Pretoria also attended.

Topics discussed included the history of FOSATU, its principles, the tasks of the shop stewards and future plans for the region.

This was followed by speeches from representatives of various

FOSATU unions.

SHOP FLOOR

Among the speakers was Brother Tom Mazibane who emphasised that strong shop stewards can only develop where there is a strong shop floor. He said shop stewards must not be afraid of impimpi's, but must rather organise them because they have no power

Brother J J Mabena also talked on the same topic, saying shop stewards must not just take decisions by themselves without discussing these with the members.

"The shop floor is always at the top," he said. Shop stewards should also not undermine illiterate members, he added.

Brother Nonjike from MAWU added several points. Shop stewards must know everything in their factory and not rely on the shop stewards' chairman, he said.

They must take clear proposals from the workers and come back with clear replies.

COUNCILS

Brother Mkhabela went on to address the meeting on shop stewards'

councils. Councils encourage shop stewards in individual factories and they experience how other shop stewards progress, he said. After this, it was decided to plan

for example in Johannesburg, Kew, Heriotdale, Industria and Steeldale. It was also resolved that the name FOSATU must appear on

a meeting to demarcate new locals,

each union's membership card.

The meeting ended with a prayer, and a collection was held for members at Electro-Plating who lost

their jobs during a strike in May this

Benoni makes progress

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THE Benoni Shop Stewards' Council was established on a formal basis in May, in accordance with the changes made to FOSATU's constitution at its national congress held earlier this year.

The council now meets every Thursday evening between 5.30 and 7.30 in the schoolroom behind the St. Joseph's church in Actonville.

All FOSATU shop stewards in the Benoni/Boksburg area are invited to attend.

CONTRIBUTION

Ezekiel Khubheke, the council chairman and chairman of the Salcast shop stewards' committee, says the Benoni council has now been well established and is already

making an important contribution to FOSATU activity in the Benoni/Boksburg local.

Between 55 and 95 shop stewards from MAWU, CWIU and NUTW have been attending the meetings each week.

The council is encouraging shop stewards from all FOSATU's member unions in the local to attend.

Topics discussed so far have included:

• the history of FOSATU and the workers' movement in South

• the aims and objectives of the workers' movement

workers' rights in the factoryretrenchments

• workers councils.

FACTORY PROBLEMS

Factory and local problems have

also been discussed, such as how the shop stewards' council can strengthen weak factories, and how works councils should be combated.

Future topics for discussion will be union agreements with management, why FOSATU unions have the kind of union structure they have, and the meaning of worker

Ezekiel Khubheka has given this message to shop stewards in Boksburg and Benoni.

"Remember, Thursday night at 5.30: This is where shop stewards can make their contribution to the workers' struggle."

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