

SOWETAN, Friday, December 21, 1984

Workers linked with Black Consciousness

THE involvement of black consciousness trade union movement in labour issues has grown rapidly in the past two years.

The formation of an alliance by nine unregistered black trade unions, founded on the notion of the black consciousness, bears testimony to this idea.

The alliance was the result of months of behind-the-scenes discussions which started in February this year, according to Mr Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, coordinator of the alliance.

Mr Nefolovhodwe, who is secretary of the Black Allied Mining and Construction Workers Union (Bamcwu) — a member of the alliance — says the ideological orientation of the unions is to provide black workers leadership.

The involvement of blacks in trade union movements is a long and traditional one which started as early as 1917 when they were not allowed recognition.

Various commissions of inquiries instituted by the South African Government recommended that blacks should not be allowed trade union recognition — but the spirit of unionism was kept alive among blacks throughout the years.

Strong

Some blacks were accommodated in white unions which accepted their membership — but there was a strong and growing need for blacks to have their own unions.

In 1971 the Black Worker Project was formed under personalities such as the exiled

South African Students Organisation and Black People's Convention member, Mr Bokwe Mafuna.

Mr Mafuna, a former journalist with a Johannesburg newspaper, together with several other black consciousness exponents, ran labour clinics throughout the country, especially in Johannesburg and Durban.

Saso and BPC were for many years the driving force of the black consciousness movement. In 1972, they were instrumental in the launching of the Black Allied Workers Union, to organise black workers exclusively.

Leaders such as Drake Koka, Lindiwe Mabandla, Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley were very influential in the running of the union, especially during the 1973 Durban

strikes. During 1977 clampdown, which included the banning of Saso and BPC, BAWU somehow survived.

With the formation of the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) in 1978 and the increasing re-examination by black consciousness activists of the nature of SA society, the unionisation of black workers was once again placed on the agenda.

Azapo, a black consciousness organisation, arranged labour clinics with the aim to assist workers. It was here that assistance was given to workers and where many of the unions which presently form part of the alliance were first discussed.

After Azapo's labour secretary, Mr Letsatsi Mosala, had helped workers on strike at

Ready Mix Concrete, in resolving their wage dispute, Bmacwu was formed in 1982.

Since that time until now, Mr Nefolovhodwe says, "We never looked

back in organising workers and we formed the alliance to help one another."

The unions which form the alliance are: Bamcwu, Insurance and Assurance Workers Union, African Allied Workers Union (AAWU), Amalgamated Black Workers Union (ABWU), Black General Workers Union (BGWU), National Union of Workers' of SA (NUWSA), Black Electronics and Electrical Workers Union (BEEWU), and the SA Scooter Drivers Union.

The Black Health and Allied Workers Union, Oranje-Vaal General Workers Union and the South African Domestic Workers Union, have given their support to the alliance, although have not formally joined.

During May a declaration of intent was adopted by the unions stating inter alia:

- That the unity of black workers is paramount in all efforts directed at the eradication of all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

- That it is the inalienable right of all worker organisations to organise themselves into a solid structure that will be capable of defending the right of workers.

- There is a need to

come together to co-ordinate resources as a means towards the fulfilment of black workers' objectives.

- The need to encourage the spirit of solidarity and unity within the black working community.

1984: That was the year that was

OUR PRETORIA Bureau reporter, **MONK NKOMO**, looks at Pretoria in 1984 and remembers some of the events that made big news in the community — including the closing down of schools.

THE year 1984 will be remembered by many in Pretoria's townships as the year of students' deaths, school boycotts, petrol bomb attacks on town councillors and the closing down of their oldest and most famous maternity hospital for blacks.

About 6 000 students boycotted classes for almost the whole year in Atteridgeville, with the students adamant that the authorities exceed to their demands, the major demand being the introduction of Student Representative Councils (SRC).

The sporadic unrests led to the fateful day on February 13 when Emma Sathekge, a form one student at the D H Peta High School was run over by a police landrover inside the school premises. She died later at the Kalafong Hospital after sustaining internal injuries.

An inquest magistrate in Pretoria, Mr J A Diener, on July 31 ruled

that Emma's death was caused by Lt David Hugo McLachlan, who drove negligently inside the school premises. The same policeman later appeared in the local magistrate court charged with culpable homicide. The case was postponed and is scheduled to be held in January next year.

Meanwhile the continuous boycotts of classes eventually resulted with the Department of Education and Training closing down the Hofmeyer, Saulridge, Flavius Mareka, Saulsville and the Dr W F Nkomo high schools for about four months. The schools were later reopened but the boycotts continued despite DET's introduction of SRC's. All the students, except the final matriculants at the six high schools will have to repeat their classes next year.

Black organisations throughout the country, then launched a massive



campaign protesting against the government's "apartheid laws". A two-day stay away from work was enforced in November. At the end of the two days two students, aged 13 and 16 years were killed after being allegedly hit by police rubber bullets. Wallace Rumskin (13) of 93 Ramokgopa Street and a standard four pupil at Mangena Mokone High or Primary School and John Phefo (16), a form one student at the Tidimanong High School in Rustenburg, who stayed at 44 Mase-mola Street, were the victims.

Mamelodi township's residents, who enjoyed a relatively quiet season, although with the highest murder rate in Pre-



1984 IS THE YEAR in which Atteridgeville students demanded a greater say in school affairs.

toria, were "shocked" when one of their councillors Elison Chiloane (48) appeared in court on three charges of attempted murder, unlawful pointing of a firearm and unlawful firing of a shot at Mr Piet Pitso. He was acquitted on two of the charges but convicted on the second count. He was warned and discharged.

Other incidents to remember included the following:

- the alleged kidnapping of an 11-year-old standard three pupil in Atteridgeville, Moses Ramonyai, who was bundled into a kombi and forcibly taken to an initiation school. Another victim was a Mamelodi taxi driver who was also kidnapped

and forced to go to the initiation school near Mamelodi. He was later released after his family intervened;

- the on-off R8 rent increases in Atteridgeville "illegally" imposed in July, were finally called off by the local town council;

- two black male employees who allegedly offered women job-seekers contraceptives before demanding "sex for jobs" at the Atteridgeville labour offices, were transferred after pressure from the local town council which investigated the matter;

- the maternity section of the Holy Cross Nursing Home, where about 25 000 babies were born since 1939, was closed down in April to make way for an old age home;

- the South African Government withdrew



PFP LEADER, Dr F van Zyl Slabbert made history by addressing a meeting of the Mamelodi People's Party.

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1984 : That was the year that was

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Putco services between Soshanguve and the city on April 30 amid protest from the commuters. Putco has since been requested by the dissatisfied residents to apply for a permit to operate again;

- the houses of Atteridgeville councillors Z Z Mashao (ex-Mayor) and E M Sibanyoni and that of the council's secretary Solomon Ramalla were

petrol bombed in separate incidents. Mr Mashao resigned from the council in November, citing pressure from his family;

- the leader of the Progressive Federal Party, Dr Frederick van Zyl Slabbert made history when he became key speaker at the inauguration of the Mamelodi People's Party on August 21;

- the worst hailstorm in years, with some stones the size of tennis balls cut a trail of havoc in GaRankuwa and Brits

in November. Damages estimated at millions of rands were incurred after the heavy storm.

And the year 1984 ended the two year's stay in the gallows for gangster Cameron "Kangaroo" Adams and Vincent "Vivi" Stuurman who were eventually executed in Pretoria on November 20. A last-ditch effort to spare them was again rejected by Mr Justice D J Curlewis who lashed at their counsel for having "played ping-pong for two years."

Vaal councillors challenge mayor

SIX Lekoa Town Council members have threatened to resign from the council if the mayor, Mr Essau Mahlatsi, does not heed their ultimatum to hold a public meeting before the end of the month.

A spokesman for the six, Mr Joseph Mosala told **The SOWETAN** in an interview yesterday that he and the other five opposition councillors have demanded that Mr Mahlatsi call "this vital meeting" in connection with the outbreak of the unrest in the Vaal township on September 3.

He said they believed that the time was long overdue for them to face the public since "we were democratically

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elected by the people."

It was unfair, he said, that Mr Mahlatsi and other councillors should wield power from their hiding places. It was high time that they came out in the open as leaders to attend to burning issues that had led to the unhappiness in the area.

"We are very much against the idea that Mr Mahlatsi should only communicate with the residents through the Press, radio and television.

"At the same time, we the opposition, take strong exception to his threatening us with disciplinary action if we voice our dissatisfaction through the media. The

mayor acts as a dictator to us in the council chambers, disallowing anyone who opposes him. As a result, the only alternative left is the Press," he said.

Mr Mosala said that until the grievances of the residents are properly attended to, he

didn't see peace returning to the troubled townships.

The Black Local Authorities Act was a failure, because councillors had no power as all their decisions are taken in consultation with the Development Board officials.