

Class struggle rises in South Africa

By Bobby Navarro

SINCE THE election of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa last year there has been a heightened level of class struggle. Workers are fighting for economic change to match the new political situation. This demonstration of working-class strength has shocked the ruling class. The ANC-led government has unleashed troops with guns and dogs against strikers, denouncing them in the press as "anarchist conspirators" who want to "impose chaos on society."

The reality is that the Government of National Unity (GNU) has done nothing to improve living standards for the vast majority of black working-class people. Unemployment is around 50%. Housing conditions remain appalling and have changed little despite the pledge to build one million homes this year alone. Revelations about corruption in high places and about the so-called "grave train" have fuelled frustration and anger in workers asked by the government to tighten their belts once more. Inflation is biting into wages. To help them out of the economic slump employers seek sackings and drive to worsen the conditions of those in work.

The GNU strategy for delivering the industrial peace and stability capitalism needs was to draw the once militant and still powerful COSATU Federation into the government. COSATU is closely aligned to the ANC and supported it in last year's elections. In return, the ANC has given former union leaders ministerial positions and made promises of social improvements for workers. A tri-partite



commission, "NEDLAC" was formed to involve unions, bosses' representatives and politicians in the economic decision-making process.

Then the cosy relationships at the top were challenged by an explosion of militancy, as black workers responded to the GNU attacks.

The Turning Wheel Workers' Union (TWWU) is one of a new wave of militant unions which are developing in South Africa in response to the failure of the leaders of the COSATU federation to stand up for the working class against the Government of National Unity. TWWU, which organises transport workers, principally in the trucking industry, was born out of the widely publicised blockades of the highways in August and September last year. Richard Madime, General Secretary of TWWU spoke to *Workers' Liberty*.

"TWWU came into being because of the lax attitudes of the unions in South

Africa to winning disputes. They were becoming conservative under the GNU, and abandoning workers to increasing exploitation. Originally, nine shop stew-

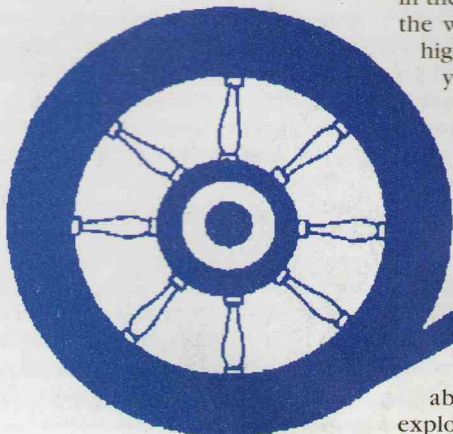
ards from different transport companies agreed the need to co-ordinate and to reinforce the strength of our union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU), pressing the demands of the rank and file.

"We agreed to hold a national meeting of truck drivers at Mooi River at midnight on Monday 8 August 1994. This was the best venue as it is central to many transport routes in the country. Trucks were arriving and stopping from 10pm onwards. Once 500 had arrived we started the meeting. By that time it was proving impossible to stop drivers spreading the meeting into a blockade of the highway.

"We called the Minister of Labour and the employers' representatives and told them the workers wanted to meet them to air grievances. The TGWU leadership refused to come and help us negotiate. They said the blockade was illegal and we should go through the union structures — the same structures that had failed us and forced us to take this action!

"When representatives returned from the phones and fax machine, a driver had been killed by a scab trying to breach the blockade with police encouragement. This caused a great deal of tension as the scab driver was white. To this day no case has

Turning Wheel Workers' Union (TWWU) logo



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