

WHAT ARE WORKERS THINKING?

In the last issue of ABASEBENZI we began to interview workers, which we continue this month with an interview with a worker from the Building Contract section of Murray and Stewart. The worker, who has been with Murray and Stewart for about the past half year said that he had not come to the Advice office with any specific problem. He had come to see that the office was functioning properly and was serving the interests of the united workers.

CONDITIONS

He described conditions at Murray and Stewart as being not bad and said that the relations between workers and management are generally good. The basic working day is from 7.30 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, but that he usually has to work overtime to earn extra money. He gets 50 cents an hour as a basic rate, and if he works overtime during the week and seven hours on Saturday he can take home R58,00 for two week work or R29,00 a week.

We asked him what opportunities he had to get a better job in the firm. He said that if he can show the bosses that he can do his job well, he may be sent to Epping to get training. After the training he would get a semi-skilled position such as a steel fixer. Although most of the Black workers at Murray and Stewart are migrants, the worker we interviewed was not. He said that permanent workers and migrant workers get the same treatment at Murray and Stewart. One of the main differences is that the company only provides housing for its migrant workers and not for its permanent workers.

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Perhaps the greatest difficulty the worker experienced was the general lack of information at work. Murray and Stewart have a liaison committee which was set up on the recommendation of the bosses. In the time that he had been working for the company there had been no meetings between the liaison committee and workers. The committee had

- 1) never reported back to the workers
- 2) never explained to them what issues they had discussed with the bosses
- 3) not told workers what had been decided upon with the bosses.

The worker did not even know who most of the liaison committee members were or if there had been any meetings of the committee! The general lack of information affected the worker directly. For instance, although deductions were made from his wages, he did not know what they were for. (Readers will find an article explaining how to read a pay slip in this issue of ABASEBENZI).

Liaison committees are questionable means of workers representation at the best of times. When they do not report back to workers they just become cosy meetings at which bosses can extract information from workers. It is easy to see how members of the liaison committee can be split off from the rest of workers by the bosses and used for their own purposes. It is vital that workers insist that ALL committees report back to them so that workers can:

- 1) know what is going on in the firm
- 2) make sure that their demands are put forward by the committee
- 3) if necessary replace committee members of the liaison committee that they are not happy with.

WHERE TO GO.....

The Western Province Workers Advice Bureau has its office at No 8 Benbow Building Beverley Street, Athlone. The office is open every Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and every Saturday morning, to give advice to workers and to help them deal with their problems.