

# THE LONG MARCH



Photo: Ingrid Gavshon

By the Sarmcol  
Workers' Cooperative

In association with Trades Union Congress/National Union of Metalworkers  
of South Africa

## THE PLAYERS

CLEMENT MNGUNI: (First narrator etc.)

37 years old, has worked for Sarmcol for 15 years as a fire control officer.

Clement has 5 children and has lived at Mpophomeni since 1974. He joined MAWU in 1982, and is a founder member of the play cast. As is the case with most of the players, he has no previous acting experience. Clement is also a keen soccer fan.

JOPHA MTSHALI: (J. Sampson etc.)

Also 37, Jopha has 8 children and has worked 20 years at Sarmcol as a machine operator. He joined MAWU in 1982, the same year he moved from Kwa Zinzele to Mpophomeni. In the play from the start, his theatrical duties mean he no longer has time to take part in the regional soccer cup, in which he was a team captain.

MADALA NGUBANE: (Sir Owen Green etc.)

Worked at Sarmcol 1974 to 1985 as teamaker in the canteen.

Joined MAWU in 1982. A distant relative of the play's author Simon Ngubane, Madala has been in the play from the start. He is 36 years old, plans to get married "after the strike" and has "batchelor-style" interests.

BONGANI MCHUNU: (The unhappy shopkeeper, distressed housewife etc.)

Was a canteen cashier at Sarmcol where he worked for 14 years. He is 33 and has 2 children aged 13 and 5. He came into the play to replace the murdered author. He has lived in Mpophomeni for 7 years and is a keen right winger – in football terms, that is.

NELSON MVELASE: (Mrs. Thatcher etc.)

31 years old, working at Sarmcol for 5 years before the strike. He came into the play at the same time as Bongani when a decision was made to expand the cast to 7 to allow for illness or other reasons for absence. Nelson has done "Gumboot" dancing since his school days, is a 'soul' music fan, and enjoys reading, from James Hadley Chase to Shakespeare.

THOMAS SHELEMBE: (The court case witness etc.)

Thomas is 37, has 3 children, and lives in the tiny Kwa Mevana township (a "black spot" right next to "white" Howick). He has worked at Sarmcol since 1966 and was a fitter earning £35 per week. (The same job done by a white is worth over £600 per month!). A founder member of the play, he is a keen boxing fan, and plays the guitar too.

ISAIAH NZIMANDE: (2nd Narrator etc.)

26 years old, resident at Mpophomeni 9 years and employed at Sarmcol 5 years as an operator where his wage was about £25 a week before overtime. Isaiah has been in the play from the start, and has also been doing training as an amateur boxer.

PETE MKHIZE

Pete is the play's promoter and co-ordinator, elected as such in October 1985.

He joined MAWU in 1982, and worked for 24 years at Sarmcol up to the position of senior clerk where his wage was about £35 per week. Pete has 7 children ranging from a 14 year old to one who is already married. In his time a Jazz group organiser, he also plays saxophone and guitar.

## WHAT IS BTR?

Although BTR is one of the 10 biggest companies in Britain, very few people have even heard of it.

Recently BTR captured the headlines when its bid to take over Pilkington's Glass so horrified the Pilkington's employees that they pushed their unions and local politicians to join hands with Pilkington's management to fight the BTR move. What worried the Pilkington's employees was BTR's reputation as a company that cares only for profit – no matter what the social cost. They feared a BTR takeover meant massive job losses, and even for those who did not lose their jobs, a profoundly anti-union company.

In Britain BTR's sacking of the 300 J.E. Hangers (Artificial Limb) workers at Roehampton last year followed the company's summary termination of the new employees' pension agreements when they took over Dunlop 3 years ago.

Outside Britain, marathon strikes have flowed from BTR's anti-union stances in Trinidad and in South Africa. In short, BTR's "Industrial Relations" record has been the first victim of the profit-at-any-cost policy. But what does BTR make? The company is so highly diversified that its lists of subsidiary companies fill pages and pages of "Who owns whom". And a look behind the anonymous "BTR" curtain reveals a range of companies well-known themselves, or providing components and products for well-known brands.

For example:

The new Jaguar XJ6 has over 50 BTR-made components. BR's "Network" commuter trains run on BTR "Silentbloc" suspension. Heathrow Airport's Terminal 4 travolators were supplied by BTR's Dunlop Engineering. At Dublin, Amsterdam and Toronto airports the matting in the airport entrances was supplied by BTR's "Nuway".

BTR has numerous contracts to supply the military, including components for Sikorsky helicopters, and rubberised overboots for infantrymen.

In the sports world, BTR's Dunlop/Slazenger subsidiary has contracts with Steffi Graf, Viv Richards, Jimmy Connors, Carling Bassett, world champion squash player Ross Norman, the entire England World Hockey Cup team, Seve Ballesteros, and the national Japanese athletic team who run on BTR's "Sorbothane" shockstoppers.

"Dunlopillo" mattresses and "Rest Assured" bedding and furniture are from the BTR stable, and so is "Pretty Polly" tights.

On the industrial side, BTR's "Dunlop Automobile" supplies wheels to Ford and GM, and is the sole supplier to Nissan UK. Escort and Sierra drivers are sitting on BTR seats. BTR's "Newey and Eyre" service the line robots making the Rover 800. BTR's "DCE Group" is the largest manufacturer in Europe of industrial dust collectors.

In the electronics world "BTR Permali" makes Satellite TV dishes. BTR's "Anker" cash registers are familiar in most chain stores while BTR's "Wallis" products are well known on the shelves of DIY stores.

In Construction "Pilkington Tiles" (from BTR) are widely used in University and municipal swimming pools. "Palmer Scaffolding" has contracts with BSC, and "Charlton Leslie" with BP. "Tilcon" road surfaces are used for speedways and draw on a range of BTR owned quarries, concrete and asphalt plants.

On the mines, "BTR Belting" supplied 18 miles of belt to British Coal's Selby mine. In the North Sea on the oil rigs, "Dunlop Oil and Marine" supplies all the major companies. And even in the nuclear power industry, BTR is present: "Charlton Metal Testing" has contract with British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield.

**To conclude:**

The shadowy "BTR" is clearly behind many household names. As the BTR workers in South Africa struggle into the 3rd year of their strike, the question must be asked: Where is BTR *consumer*-vulnerable?

## THE PLAY AND THE CAMPAIGN

From the land of Apartheid comes a dramatised true story about life "on the ground". *The Long March* is a unique play, for its actors are involved totally with the production: It is about their own lives and their own struggle.

Their story is shocking: they were sacked after many years of employment at poverty wages by top-ten UK multinational company BTR when they struck for recognition of their union, MAWU\*. This was in May 1985, and their strikers are still meeting regularly each week to repeat their demand to BTR: *'Negotiate with our union or get out of South Africa.'*

Their story is one of solidarity and survival. Solidarity has come from other workers and whole communities in their area who have staged stayaways that have paralysed the region, and from BTR Dunlop workers in South Africa who have gone on strike in sympathy. Survival for the strikers in their semi-rural area (where BTR is the only major employer) has meant self-help: they have set up co-operatives to handle bulk food buying, to grow vegetables, to maintain a health service. One of the strikers' co-ops makes T-shirts for the South African labour movement.

BTR has refused to speak to the strikers or their union, so the union has had to take BTR to court in a marathon legal battle which is still going on. While South African police have waded into the strikers' pickets and while vigilantes have abducted and murdered strike leaders, BTR in the UK has maintained that the strike is a local affair in which the company's head office will not intervene. But now the BTR strikers have brought their play to Britain as step one in their campaign to generate enough British support for their struggle to bring about a rethink from BTR.

The BTR strikers' campaign will be aiming at targets such as BTR's consumer-vulnerable products like Dunlop sports goods; BTR's construction industry subsidiaries' contracts with public bodies; BTR's shareholders via pension fund pressures. And linkups will be sought with potential victims of BTR takeover bids.

You can help:

- Come see *The Long March* and contribute to the strike fund. Local Anti-Apartheid groups around Britain will be assisting in the BTR campaign, so join your local AA and lend a hand!
  - The BTR strikers' T-shirt co-operative is selling T-shirts bearing the logos of the South African labour movement, to raise strike funds: *Buy one and wear it to spread the word about the struggle!*
  - The TUC has pledged support to the strikers' union on this issue. Get your own union branch to join the campaign.
- For further information contact: SAWCO, c/o 12 Manor Road Extension, Leicester LE2 4FF. Tel: (0533) 712041.**

\*Now NUMSA

# THE LONG MARCH: TOUR OF BRITAIN, 1987

## September

- 3 London, Hackney Empire: Preview for press and invited guests.
- 5 Mansfield, Notts Miners' Gala: Solidarity performance.
- 7,9 Blackpool, TUC Congress: Performances for delegates and visitors.
- 11 Liverpool, University Theatre: Public performances start.
- 13 Manchester, Sheena Simons 6th Form College.
- 14 Ceremonial public delivery of complimentary tickets to London opening night of "The Long March" to Sir Owen Green, chairman of BTR at Silvertown House, 89 Vincent Square, London SW1.
- 15-19 London, Hackney Empire.
- 21 Derby, West Indian Hall.
- 22 Leicester, Hillfields Community Workshop.
- 23 Coventry, West Indian Hall.
- 24,25,26 Birmingham, The Cave.
- 27 Brighton, Labour Party Conference, International Evening.
- 29 Brighton, Co-op Hall.
- 30 Wales\*

## October

- 1 Wales\*
- 2,3 Bristol.
- 5 Leeds, Trades Club.
- 6 Sheffield, Memorial Hall.
- 7 Huddersfield.
- 8 Hull, Trade Union Centre.
- 9 York.
- 10 Barnsley.
- 12 Glasgow, Jordan Hill College.
- 13,14,15 Edinburgh, Traverse Theatre.
- 16 p.m. Stirling, Trade Union Hall.
- Late p.m. Glasgow, Tran Theatre.
- 17 Glasgow, Maryhill Community Central Halls.
- 19,20 Tyneside\*
- 22,23 Lancashire\*
- 26-31 East Anglia, including Cambridge, Norwich, Colchester\*.

## November

- 1 London, Brixton\*.

\* Exact details to be confirmed:  
contact 0533-712041

## SYNOPSIS OF "THE LONG MARCH"

The play is in two languages, English and Zulu, but it is never difficult to understand for those who do not speak Zulu because the actions of the play speak as loudly as the words. What follows is an outline of the scenes or "sketches" which make up the play.

1. Opening song "We'll go on strike".
2. Narrator explains the background to working at Sarmcol: forced off the land, forced from one township to another, and generations of union resistance amidst ongoing oppression.
3. Working in Sarmcol under the regime of "big boss" J. Sampson.
4. The strike – J. Sampson's surprise!
5. International telecommunications results in dismissal of the strikers.
6. Scabs are hired from the ranks of the starving unemployed, and in the inevitable conflict that follows police intervene on the side of BTR.
7. The community boycott of the white owned shops, initiated by the strikers, leads white shop owners to plead with Sampson to relent – in vain!
8. BTR Chairman Owen Green takes Mrs. Thatcher to task for her "tiny" concessions to the Commonwealth initiative to end Apartheid. Having lost R8 million in the Sarmcol strike, Green tells Maggie: "Dammit, you are getting soft!"
9. The strikers organise union and church meetings in Mpophomeni, but all the meetings are banned there and the police move in.
10. Outlawed in Howick, the strikers move their protest campaign to the city of Pietermaritzburg, blockading the centre with 10 buses and pamphletting the black community – with varying response!
11. The strikers organise a one-day stayaway (a regional general strike). Again, there is a mixed response from the community at first.
12. But on the day the bosses are the only ones at work: as intended they exert pressure to stop all this strike business, but BTR Sarmcol's ears are closed.
13. Police intervention to crush the community resistance is foiled by youth who build barricades in the black townships.
14. The long strike means no rents are being paid, no bills settled. But the women are united in the resistance and turn back the repossession men. They struggle on, surviving on meagre union food parcels.
15. The Sarmcol Workers Co-op, where the strikers make T-shirts for progressive organisations like COSATU, and sing at work because *they* control production and profits.
16. The strikers' union takes Sarmcol to the industrial court and busses 900 strikers into the court proceedings each day: the workers see the legal battle (on which judgement is still pending).
17. The "Amabutho" (Inkatha supporters) move in on Mpophomeni, terrorising the community and murdering strike leadership, including Simon Ngubane, author of the play.
18. The funeral of murdered comrades becomes a statement of "No surrender".
19. The Narrator explains that "The Long March" will continue until it reaches Pretoria.
20. "We are still on strike" – after two and a half years: closing song