

Neither the manner in which we were treated nor the working conditions have improved. The place is still full of black dust and dust from various chemicals, which make you cough - even if you are not directly involved in that section. My foreman continued to work in the same section, was promoted to senior foreman and became very nasty towards me.

One evening when I was working night shift, just after I had bought a Ford Escort car, he kept on calling me to accuse me of making mistakes. He failed to make me sign for these mistakes but said he had to fire me because I had a lot of money (I was a boss). He did not know why I worked at Dunlop because I drove a lovely car.

We were told one Friday that we had to work from midday on Sunday. I excused myself as I had already made preparations to go home. I went off on Saturday and came back on Monday morning, leaving home at 1 am to arrive at work at 5.30am. At 6.30am I was called to the office where I found the foreman cancelling my form. He took out my card and wrote on it, without speaking to me.

After he had finished what he was doing, he told me to "sign here". I wanted to know why I should sign? He said, because I had not turned up at work on Sunday. I told him I was not prepared to sign, because I had only been told on the Friday night that I would be working on Sunday,

after I had made preparations to travel home to the rural areas. The counsellor told me that the factory regulations stipulate that if a worker does not turn up for work, he has to sign a warning.

I told the counsellor that I would not sign: "I want to be fired by you, here. You know a lot about Dunlop's regulations and you know too much English. Tell them to fire me. I will tell the whole world that I was fired because I refused to work on Sunday. And when I receive my pay I will throw it in the rubbish bin." My enemy (the foreman) stood up and told me that I was ordered to work on Sunday.

"But," I replied, "only on Friday night, when I had already bought a sack of potatoes, a case of tomatoes, meat worth R10.00, cases of fruit and a sack of oranges. Who was I going to share the food with? I stay alone in Durban. That is why I say you must fire me - if I did the wrong thing by not reporting at work."

I then turned my attention to the counsellor and inquired why he had come to the office. He said he had come to hear my case.

"Have you come to persecute me or to defend me?" I asked him.

"Do you think the counsellor can prevent you from signing and being fired?" the senior foreman asked me.

"Yes," I said, "I have chosen him for that purpose."

"You will never see that happening in this factory."

"Buzz off, you are not my lawyer," I told him.

"He is not going out of this office, because he is here to defend the company and not you."

"If he is not here to defend me but the company its okay, chase me away, because I won't sign."

He then said that it was not a verbal warning, that it had to be signed. I told him I wanted to be chased away because I refused to sign. He became very angry and told me fiercely to get out of his office: "But I will get you one day, I will make you sign, you think you are clever."

I did not care, he could speak and say anything, I knew that he did what he did all because I had bought a car.

One day in 1976 when I was still working at Dunlop a telegram arrived for me at work. It said: "Come home immediately!" Something had gone wrong.

The supervisor gave me the telegram, and when I told him I had to go home, he went to tell the foreman and the senior foreman. The senior foreman said he wanted me at work, that I was telling him a load of rubbish. I did not bother him but proceeded straight to the Bantu Affairs Commission. They told me to go home but to send a telegram and let them know what had happened and when I would be back.

The senior foreman was very disappointed, claiming that the personnel people were allowing me to go because they were my friends. I asked him why he did not join them and become my friend as well. He answered that I did not help him with anything. I said to him that I would never become a sell out for anybody. He replied that I was swearing at him, and that he would have helped me with anything.

At this time conditions were very bad for the workers at Dunlop. They were chased away from work daily.

There was one man, Mr Makhathini, who was liked for his dedication to work at Dunlop. Trouble started for him when we returned after going home for Good Friday, in April 1976. He was getting old, not producing as big a score as before. He was often called and asked whether he still wanted to work at Dunlop. He was made to sign because his production was low, despite the fact that he repeatedly told them that he was not feeling well. Eventually he was admitted to hospital. When he returned to Dunlop, he discovered that he had been written off and he was only given money after a long time.

From that time onwards I hated the Dunlop factory. It used people very hard and then, when they had no strength to produce more, dumped them like rubbish. I realised that I would eventually be in the same position as Mr Makhathini.

I hoped I could do something to protect myself from the cruel hands at Dunlop, because they fired many people who were hurt at work.

I remember one man who was hit by a Fork Lift Truck. He was told to come back daily to sit at the entrance, and was given nothing to alleviate his pain. His legs were swollen and he could not even use a stick to walk. I asked him why he did not go to King Edward Hospital. He did and was admitted immediately. On his return he was scolded and fired. There was nothing I could do.

I tried to think of ways to escape all this misery but could find no solution.

We started to discuss the bad conditions of work at Dunlop and the manner in which people were fired daily without any reason. One of the workers suggested that we join a trade union. He told me that the offices were at 125 Gale Street. We all agreed to visit the office, to tell them about our working conditions, and to ask about the trade union movement.

The fork lift truck drivers decided to meet and discuss what steps we could take to join the union. We were totally dissatisfied with our bonus. Although we produced a lot more than the other workers our merit bonus was smaller. Through our ceaseless fight we managed to secure a bonus of up to R23.00 - before this we only received a R2.00 bonus.

We joined MAWU (Metal and Allied Trade Union) and paid a certain amount every month end. Soon we were organising other workers to join the union.

In 1981 the senior foreman was promoted to shop manager at the Mill Depot. The following Monday he wore a new safari suit and new shoes, limping because the shoes were too tight. I laughed out loud, I could not hold myself in. He became very angry and asked why I was laughing at him.

I told him I was laughing at a conversation I was having with Gumedé. Did he want me to laugh at him?

He replied that he was no fool, that he could see I was laughing at him but that it was not the first time a person limped because of tight shoes. If I continued to laugh he would fire me. I told him to fire me because I had not said that his shoes should be too tight for him.

I had already told Gumede that he should say that we were talking about a girl who was walking with her boyfriend. When they came to the Dalton Road Hostel, she saw two men playing karate. She jumped very high and kicked her boyfriend on the back so that he fell. The boyfriend was furious and he took his shambok and beat her up. She tried to soothe him by saying: "Oh, lovey! Why are you hitting me so hard". But the boyfriend carried on beating her up.

I told the shop manager that I was laughing at this. He asked Gumede, who related the same story. The foreman was sorry.

By 1982 many Dunlop workers had joined our trade union. The employers started encouraging people to join their union, the Durban Rubber Industrial Union, which had existed for a long time but had not allowed Africans to join. The DRIU then promised to build all its members high class houses, trying everything to discourage people from joining MAWU as they claimed it was political.

DRIU held a meeting in our canteen. A lot of workers attended the meeting as it was held early in the morning. But when the workers wanted to know where the union offices were, they discovered that one was in the factory and the other in Pretoria. They wanted to know, if they were fired or had a problem with the factory, how would they enter the factory gates, because they would not have a permit to enter? Would we have to wait at the fence and shout to DRIU: "My union! Come, it's me! I have been fired, come and speak on my behalf"?

The reply was: "Yes, you would have to do that." All the workers left the meeting just then. The speaker had already told the workers that they had done the wrong thing by leaving a trade union inside the factory and joining an outside union - MAWU - which would never be given entry.

"So I beg you to join DRIU, a union recognised by the Industrial Council and by your employers. Stop joining a union which will get you fired from work and misuse your money."

Workers left and told them to keep their employers' trade union - they were going to the MAWU meeting. On the same day we went to the MAWU meeting at Bolton Hall. A lot of workers, more than 50 percent,

joined on that day. The following week MAWU organisers came to our gates and more workers joined.

One organiser - Mary Anne Cullinan - was arrested by the police. She was taken and brought back three times. Finally they said there was nothing they could do - if she was invited to come she had to come - and they said she must continue with her work.

Finally we held a meeting of all Dunlop workers where we decided that a delegation should be sent to the management to discuss the holding of stop orders. A letter was written and sent to the company. They replied that they were willing to have a meeting at the Royal Hotel and not in the factory. They felt bad that they were going to talk with workers and not the organisers. I am sure you, the reader of the story, would like to know what was happening inside the factory.

The workers who were in the Steering Committee, were just ordinary people, who did not dress well and were not well educated. There was a great dispute between MAWU and DRIU. DRIU was saying they had never seen blind people leading each other, that they wanted to see what the outcome of everything would be

MAWU on the other hand was saying: "Leave us alone, even if your spies and informers tell you what they like, we will succeed, we are the leaders".

MAWU members went to the meeting with their organiser, Geoff Schreiner, who management had feared was of East-German origin. He was a young man who knew his job well. All members of MAWU were excited, DRIU members were rather sad. When we got the report back from the meeting we encouraged DRIU members to join our trade union organisation, because we knew they had made a mistake by joining DRIU. Many of them joined MAWU.

On February 1983 it was agreed that the union could get entry into the factory and in March an agreement was signed. Fifteen shop stewards were elected, three for each department. I was also chosen as one of the shop stewards.

Meetings were held to discuss working conditions and wages. The employers were very reluctant to discuss these matters. This company has not done a good thing for any of its workers but it has done many cruel things.

Some companies help their workers in various matters; they buy them houses and deduct a small amount of money every month. Dunlop claims that they help but only loaned people up to R850.00. We requested that the amount go up to R2000. After long negotiations they increased it to R1050.00. Agreements and contracts had to be signed before you could get the money.

We decided to go slow, so that production was at a minimum, and stopped working overtime. The Minister of Manpower appointed a Conciliation Board to investigate the problems at Dunlop, but it failed to come up with a solution. We started to collect money for our Strike Fund, deciding that we would call a total boycott of work when we were sure everything suited our strike action. At the time there were still a lot of tyres, they were not selling fast because a lot of customers, about 13 percent, buy their tyres overseas.

We were still seeking a way to overpower the company. A few people were fired and new workers employed but even these were encouraged to join MAWU. We were going to strike when the right time came, we were not in a hurry. Our employers always asked when we were going on strike - they knew we had already set money aside for the strike. We told them that when the time came we would do it, that they should not bother us: "We know what we are doing".

I have never seen such a cruel company. When we started to go slow a lot of workers were fired. The department I worked in is terrible and the various chemicals have a bad effect on the workers' health. People should be earning more money and receive a lot of benefits. But none were forthcoming.

I will write more about this bad company. I will not leave it alone yet, as I want to fight for the workers' rights. I hope when you read this story, you will note all the bad effects the company has on workers and the gross exploitation which occurs in this firm.