

HEALTH and safety at the workplace is rapidly becoming a prime issue for workers.

For too long South African employers have cut corners by not caring for either the health or the safety of their workers.

And on top of this, the law provides little protection for workers even though a brand new Machinery and Occupational Safety Act has just been passed.

Recently, a visiting American expert on occupational health, Barry Castleman, said the local health and safety standards were 'primitive'.

He said the new act lagged decades behind protection offered workers elsewhere in the world.

But what he said is not new to FOSATU. He merely confirmed what FOSATU has been saying all along.

However, FOSATU believes that a union offers real collective protection for workers.

So affiliated unions have embarked on their own health and safety campaigns by tackling the problems within their particular industry.

Setting the pace, the National Union of Textile Workers two years ago launched a highly successful campaign against Brown Lung - a lung disease caused by cotton dust.

Last month's FOSATU Worker News reported that a Hammarsdale worker, John Hlela, had been granted a compensation of R109 a month for the rest of his life after it was proved he had been disabled by Brown Lung.

Now the NUTW is stepping up its health and safety campaign and at the beginning of the

S.A. health and safety standards 'decades behind'

month employed a full time health and safety officer - Dr Neil White.

Dr White has been a key figure

in the union's Brown Lung campaign which has required active involvement from union shop stewards and members.

NUTW's general secretary, John Copelyn said as well as continuing the Brown Lung Campaign, Dr White would be



Dr Neil White asks workers questions about their health during one of the factory campaigns

educating union shop stewards on health issues.

'This is so that they can learn to recognise conditions in the factory which are unhealthy or dangerous for workers,' he said.

A slide show on the Brown Lung campaign has also been put together which will be shown to everyone in the union as part of the health education campaign.

Brother Copelyn said NUTW's National Executive Committee had recently re-examined the union's health and safety efforts.

'We looked at the practice of British unions who on the whole merely file compensation claims.

'And we looked at American unions who focus around pressuring the State to adopt better health and safety standards', he said.

He added that in America, the Brown Lung campaigns were organised by Brown Lung Associations which were completely separate from the union.

The National Executive resolved to rather try to negotiate better conditions in the factory coupled with hazard pay for workers.

Brother Copelyn said in this way workers would be compensated for working in dusty conditions.

NUTW hoped this would encourage a greater awareness by textile companies of dust levels and would lead to regular testing of the levels by both the union and the companies.

He said Dr White's appointment would allow the union to expand its campaign beyond Brown Lung to other health areas like the danger of chemicals and the problem of noise.

Shatterprufe cuts costs at expense of workers

CUTTING costs at the expense of workers is a common practice of management during a period of recession.

Following the signing of a recognition agreement at Shatterprufe Safety Glass in Pretoria, workers were quick to take up this issue.

The factory is working a short time of three hours a week so when management asked one department to work overtime they refused.

Workers asked why they should work overtime when the rest of the factory was on short time.

They also asked why management had increased production targets in the plant while they were working short time.

CHEATED

Workers felt cheated because: - they were now expected to produce more goods per hour than previously and so had to work harder.

- they were receiving less wages because of the short time.

- management was therefore receiving the same production at less cost while workers were working harder for less money.

Workers became furious and stopped work for six hours demanding the stopping of short time or a reduction in production targets and no overtime work.

After negotiations with the Chemical Workers Industrial

Union, the company agreed to reduce production targets.

In turn, the workers agreed to work overtime in the event of a breakdown. They then returned to work.

Meanwhile at another Shatterprufe factory in Port Elizabeth, the company has signed a recognition agreement with the CWIU.

RESIGNED

Last FOSATU Workers News we reported that workers had resigned from the 'useless' Glass Workers Union and had joined CWIU.

Newly elected shop steward, Ernest Scholtz said there was now a completely different atmosphere in the factory.

'Workers for the first time now have a say in their own working conditions,' he said.

After the signing of the agreement, he said, about another hundred guys signed joining forms for the union there and then.

'The first thing we will be doing away with is the provident fund and we will introduce a new pension scheme,' Brother Scholtz said.

'The only time a worker ever got paid out of the provident fund was when he joined the staff,' he added.

Meat bosses still anti-union

THE price of meat may have gone up and down recently but the hard line attitude of meat companies towards trade unions seems to have remained constant.

In 1980 more than 800 meat workers went on strike in the Western Cape in a bid to win recognition of their union - the General Workers Union.

But even though the strike spread to a countrywide boycott of meat, the workers were unsuccessful.

Now again, at the State-owned

Cato Ridge Abattoir worker members of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union are pushing for recognition.

Management have refused to even talk to SFAWU until the union extends its scope of registration to cover Cato Ridge and prove paid up membership.

Branch organiser Jay Naidoo said the union had applied for an extension of scope but did not feel this should be an important factor.

'The company should recog-

nise a union solely on the support it has in the factory,' he said.

If the abattoir wanted to test the support, the SFAWU has said it was prepared to have a ballot, Brother Naidoo added.

In the meantime, the union is preparing to take legal action against the abattoir and has already informed the company that it would declare a dispute unless it set a date for the negotiation of a recognition agreement.

Clash looms between Frame and NUTW

THE battle between the National Union of Textile Workers and Frame is heating up.

After ten years of fighting for recognition, workers know that they can expect Frame to try every trick in the book.

Earlier this year FOSATU Worker News reported on NUTW's success in getting a court order blocking Frame from recognising sweetheart union - the Textile Workers

Industrial Union.

However, Frame is never slow to head for the gap and when the court order expired and no conciliation board had been appointed, the company once again started deducting stop orders for TWIU.

This greatly angered workers who were told by TWIU men that this proved that 'NUTW can never defeat Frame'.

But NUTW moved fast and is going back to the Industrial Court to again block Frame from recognising its sweetheart union.

Support for NUTW is growing fast in spite of these problems and it has organised to bus Frame workers up to the court case in Pietermaritzburg on September 5 so they can hear

for themselves what is happening.

It now seems that TWIU has lost all credibility as many more Frame workers cross the floor to NUTW.

Regional FOSATU secretary, Prof Sineke said 'We will give our brothers and sisters in Frame all the support they need. Ten years ago they started our unions and now we'll help them win their long battle.'

