

Brown Lung pay out

Union takes employers to court

THE Jewellers and Goldsmiths Union is taking their employers' association to the Industrial Court in a bid to block the deskilling of workers and the bringing in of cheap labour.

Since 1958, the JGU has had an agreement with the employers which protected the standards of artisanship in this highly skilled industry.

The agreement requires that employers give proper training to workers who will eventually become journeymen.

However, with the introduction of mass production in the industry, employers are trying to argue that they do not need apprentices anymore.

JGU general secretary, Ted Frazer said the union had decided to 'dig our heels in' at this vindictive action by the employers.

Starvation wages not acceptable

SOUTH African employers must learn that the days of paying starvation wages are over.

This is the message from FOSATU's president, Chris Dlamini, who was part of the negotiating team which won an amazingly high increase for workers at Isando factory, Simba Quix.

In terms of the recently completed wage agreement, the majority of the workers at the factory will get a 112 percent increase.

This will push their wages up from R45 a week to R85 a week and on top of this they will get a R15,63 night shift allowance.

Brother Dlamini said the company had tried to resist paying a high increase 'but we told them that they must pay for the previous years when they had been exploiting workers'.

THE National Union of Textile's Brown Lung campaign is beginning to pay off.

The union has been informed that John Hlela, a Hammarisdale textile worker, will be paid a compensation of R109 a month for the rest of his life.

And because his claim was made in April last year, he will also receive a back pay sum of over R1 000.

The Bureau for Occupational Diseases has accepted that Brother Hlela is 70 percent disabled because of Brown Lung - a disease caused by cotton dust.

It is believed that Brother Hlela is the first black worker in South Africa to be paid compensation for Brown Lung since it was declared a scheduled disease in 1972.

Overseas hundreds of claims are made every year for workers suffering from Brown Lung but in South Africa very few have been made.

The NUTW is trying to remedy this and over the past two years has been conducting intensive Brown Lung campaigns in a number of textile factories around the country.

Brother Hlela's case is a good example of the dangers of the disease.

In 1971 he took a job as a

machine operator in the spinning department at Natal Thread in Hammarisdale.

By 1975, he said, he began to feel tightness in his chest and sometimes became very short of breath.

At times this was so bad that

he would collapse in the factory and have to be taken outside to get his breath.

By 1981, when the union began organising in the factory, his illness was so bad that he was having difficulty in managing a full days work.



John Hlela

Shortly after this the company fired him.

He is 33 years old and has three children to support.

The NUTW had just begun to prepare its Brown Lung campaign, and Brother Hlela was taken as a test case.

He was tested by a union doctor and found to have Brown Lung and claims were put in for him to the Bureau for Occupational Diseases.

Since then thousands of workers have been tested for Brown Lung and the NUTW has put in claims for 6 workers at Mooi River Textiles (Natal), 2 workers at Industex (E Cape) and for a worker at Braitex in the Transvaal.

Recently the union tested 400 workers in the spinning department at David Whiteheads at Tongaat - the spinning department is the dustiest part of a textile factory and where a worker is more likely to get Brown Lung.

NUTW's National Executive Committee has started to formulate demands for hazard pay for workers working in dusty areas.

These will relate to the levels of cotton dust and will serve as an incentive for textile firms to keep down their dust levels in the factory.

Union's housing scheme

A SPECIAL scheme to provide funds for housing and education is to be launched by the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union.

This follows discussions in all NAAWU's branches where it was decided that union funds should be used to provide housing and health services for union members as well as bursaries for training and education.

NAAWU's president, Jury Harris said the union had received feedback from its membership that money currently in the union's benefit fund should be fed into these important areas.

'We do not want to go the way of most other benefit and pension funds which just invest money to the benefit of the bosses and financial institutions,' he said.

'We want to put our money where it will help members and the community,' he added.

Initially, education bursaries will be available for the dependants of members in standards nine and ten only and will be awarded as from the 1984 school year.

Brother Harris said the union believed that bursaries were needed most in standards nine

and ten.

'At the end of standard ten, a student can go on to technical training or university where many bursaries are available,' he explained.

He said that this scheme would be continually revived to ensure that the interests of workers were catered for and to ensure that we were not just creating a class to exploit the mothers and fathers.

NAAWU has also in principle decided to use its benefit funds to assist members in getting houses.

In doing this the union is

following the lead of many other progressive unions overseas.

In countries like Holland, for example, almost half of the housing in the country is provided by the trade union movement.

Full details of this project still have to worked out and reported to members.

To do this a committee consisting of one representative from each NAAWU area, assisted by the secretariat, has been mandated to work out the specific details and how best to implement the scheme.



Rising worker interest in Unity

THERE is a growing interest among workers in the present moves towards trade union unity. At this meeting more than 300 workers gathered at FOSATU's Germiston offices to discuss 'The History of the Labour Movement in South Africa in relation to Unity'. At the meeting FOSATU's president, Chris Dlamini, reported back on the recent meeting of the feasibility committee - this was formed after the April Unity meeting in order to discuss the details of forming a new federation. The feasibility committee met in Cape Town at the beginning of July where the structures and policies of a federation were discussed. Another meeting will be held in October.