

SEIFSA heads for collision

SEIFSA, the giant metal employers' association, has renewed its call for its members to resist any trade union pressure for plant-level bargaining.

It is highly likely that this call will lead to a head-on confrontation with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Particularly in Natal the union has succeeded in negotiating wages over and above the minimums set at the industrial council with a number of employers.

SEIFSA's call was made in a recent circular sent out to all metal employers shortly after the industrial council negotiations.

The circular says that 'certain trade unions have indicated that they intend to approach member companies to negotiate wage increase over and above those agreed during the industrial council's negotiating process.'

'Specific requests were made to SEIFSA to revoke the advice given to members in this regard. This course of action has been rejected by SEIFSA,' the circular says.

It adds that it is 'imperative' that metal employers resist any approaches by trade unions which 'undermine' the principle

of a centralised collective bargaining system.

SEIFSA says that any employer who is considering entering into plant-level bargaining must understand that they are establishing an 'alternative' collective bargaining arrangement to the industrial council.

Natal branch secretary, Geoff Schreiner said there were a number of companies which had decided to follow SEIFSA's line.

'And as a result MAWU is taking industrial court action against them for refusing to bargain at plant-level with the representative union,' he said.

He singled out CYC Engineering, McKinnon Chain, Hart, Wispeco and Pineware.

At CYC Engineering, he said, the union had signed a recognition agreement with the company which provided for plant-level bargaining.

'But management has refused to comply with the terms of the agreement and has said the company is bound by SEIFSA's policy,' he added.

At Pineware, Brother Schreiner said the company had given increases over and above the industrial council minimums but had refused to negotiate these

with the union.

Meanwhile he said, there were companies who had seen the 'wisdom' of plant-level talks.

At APV Kestner in Maritzburg the union has negotiated an extra R4,50 a week increase over and above the industrial council increase — this pushes the minimum wage at the company up to R100,35 a week.

At another Maritzburg company, Pillar Naco, MAWU negotiated an effective R5,40 increase.

At City Metal Products and Camerons, workers will get an extra R5,85 across-the-board.

And at Forbo Kromenie, the union has won an effective increase of R7,20 a week above the industrial council negotiated increase — by January 1 the minimum wage at this company will be R121,50 a week.

In negotiations, Forbo Kromenie also agreed to pay workers double time on Saturdays and time-and-a-half on weekdays for their overtime work.

Increased worker pressure for plant-level negotiations will surely open SEIFSA's eyes to the benefits of negotiations at both levels.

with metal workers

OVER the years, workers at Hart have belonged to various unions, but there has been no real worker representatives in the factory.

The company used the Works Council to make their oppressive rules work. Fortunately, in 1983, the workers joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union in big numbers and in that way it was granted access as the majority union. MAWU gained recognition in August 1983 and became the workers' representative to bargain for higher wages and better working conditions. And so all other unions disappeared.

It was the first union to introduce shop stewards as worker representatives who were elected by the workers themselves to carry out their wishes.

The union carried on representing the workers but the company refused to negotiate wages, as a result of which the matter has now been referred to the industrial court.

On May 2, the workers downed tools at lunch time until 4.30 pm because we wanted to tell management personally that we were dissatisfied with the wages we were getting.

The boss did not come to us, despite the fact that he had promised to talk to us. We were eventually told that the company would give us an increase after the new industrial council agreement comes into operation on July 1.

From that day on there has been a misunderstanding between the workers and the employers because the bosses failed to honour this promise.

The workers decided to ban overtime work because it is clear that the employers are trying to fool us — they have said that they have money for overtime work but they say they don't have the money to raise our wages.

At the moment the bosses are saying that the production is going slowly. They are trying hard to get the workers to work overtime. We are saying NO! We won't work overtime until the bosses agree to negotiate wages with MAWU. The bosses say they are waiting for the court's decision. But united we shall win.

A HART SHOP STEWARD



For three days during lunch breaks, Wispeco workers demonstrated outside the company's administration building. A Metal and Allied Workers Union shop steward said the workers had held the placard demonstration in support of their demands for wage talks with the union and a 50c an hour increase.

R6 million pay out

THERE was great excitement in all Putco depots on July 19 when the company paid out over R6 million in backpay to workers.

The backpayments were a welcome relief for workers who had been waiting for more than a year for their wage increase.

Last year's bitter wage talks began with Putco starting with an offer of no increase.

The Transport and General Workers Union had demanded an across-the-board increase of R65 and also improvements in conditions of service.

TGWU, joined by CUSA's Transport and Allied Workers Union deadlocked with Putco when the company refused to budge from its final offer of R4.

As bus drivers are barred by law from striking, the dispute was referred to the industrial court for arbitration last September.

TGWU spent many months preparing evidence for the arbitration.

It gathered information on

wages in other bus companies, the cost of living, and the finances of the company in order to present a strong case at the industrial court.

Finally, in March this year an arbitrator was appointed and the case got going.

The wait was made worthwhile when the arbitrator announced on June 26 that workers should get an immediate increase of 15,5 percent.

On that day, hundreds of union members poured out of court singing and chanting.

The increase awarded by the arbitrator was backpaid for six months and, on top of this, an additional three percent interest was paid out.

The unions then sat down and negotiated a settlement for the six months of last year which was not covered by the arbitrator's award.

The final agreement was a 6,15 percent increase for those six months paid with an interest of nine percent.

It was agreed that all the backpay would be paid in one lump

sum.

Commenting on the settlement, a union spokesperson said, 'It took a very long time and tensions were high at times during the wait — but it was definitely worth it.'

'We have no doubt that Putco has learnt their lesson — wage negotiations need to be taken seriously.'

'In fact, we are already into the next round of negotiations for 1984/5 and we are already feeling the difference,' she said.

'So the outcome was not only a victory because we put wages on a better footing but also because we balanced things out a bit with the company,' she added.

'But the most important result,' the spokesperson said, 'is that all workers in the company can now see that the union has powers to do things which the old liaison committees can never do.'

'The case has been a means of mobilising and strengthening support for the union,' she concluded.

Biscuit union crumbles as workers leave to join SFAWU

FOR the past three years support for TUCSA's National Union of Operative Biscuit Makers and Packers has been crumbling.

Biscuit workers, particularly from the major Bakers company, have been joining Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

However, the TUCSA union, under Norman Daniels, has been attempting to keep its position as sole representative of biscuit workers through control of the industrial council.

Union joins council

Wages and working conditions in the biscuit industry are set by this small industrial council. The major employer on this council is Bakers.

In order to represent its members nationally, SFAWU this year decided to join the industrial council.

Challenge to Daniels

A SFAWU spokesperson said, 'We knew that there would be opposition from Daniels as he is scared that our presence on the council will further challenge his position in the industry.'

Only majority union

'And as we predicted at the council's meeting on July 10, Daniels objected to the fact that Bakers did not allow nine of his members from the company's Westmead factory to attend the meeting.'

'Both SFAWU and Bakers

have agreed that only the majority union will represent workers at the Westmead factory,' the spokesperson said.

He added that Daniels 'clearly has no respect for the decision taken by the majority of workers.'

Ends with dispute

The meeting ended with Daniels threatening to declare a dispute with Bakers' representatives at the council.

Meanwhile, workers at the Bakers factory at Westmead near Pinetown report that the TUCSA union is using the small support it has to sow division among the workers.

Security Police arrive

Towards the end of last month three security police arrived at the factory as they thought that SFAWU was having a report-back meeting.

Workers said that the security police told guards at the factory gate that Timothy Zondi — a TUCSA union member — had sent for them.

They then asked to speak to the SFAWU shop stewards.

Bakers workers were furious and demanded the dismissal of Timothy Zondi.

Final warning given

After talks between management and SFAWU shop stewards, Bakers gave Zondi a final warning.