

R200 pension for life!

FORTY-year-old Maria Maseko was one of the first workers discovered to have the cotton dust disease, Brown Lung, in the National Union of Textile Workers' health and safety campaign.

But, it has taken over two years for the Workmens' Compensation Commissioner to agree to pay her compensation for her disability.

When the union initially applied for compensation the Commissioner refused so the NUTW appealed against this decision as it was clear from Dr Neil White's tests that Sister Maseko had severe lung problems.

The union's appeal was successful and the Commissioner has now agreed to pay her about R1 5000 back-pay and a pension for life of nearly R200 a month.

Sister Maseko for the past sixteen years has worked in the weaving department at the Braitex factory in Springs.

In an interview with FOSATU Worker News recently, Sister Maseko described the conditions in the department as 'very dusty'.

'The more you were winding the more dust there was,' she said.

She said that in about 1976 she started to feel 'short of breath' and would cough continuously.

'I had a feeling that it was caused by the blow cleaning of the machine because the dust used to come through my nostrils,' Sister Maseko said.

'When I used to go to an outside doctor he used to tell me that I had got a cold and would give me some pills.'

'Well, it did not help as the feelings just continued,' she added.

Sister Maseko said that at times she would be off sick 'sometimes for three days and sometimes for a week'.

'As time went on I had more problems with my chest,' she added.

After NUTW's health and safety officer, Dr White, found that Sister Maseko had Brown Lung during a campaign at the factory, Braitex moved her to the dispatch department.

'But I still feel angry,' Sister Maseko said, 'as it was the conditions in the factory which caused my sickness and these have not changed. They are still blow cleaning their machines.'

The case of Sister Maseko underlines the importance of the union's Brown Lung campaign.

Last year the employers' association, the Textile Federation, told NUTW that it should drop its campaign as the federation had decided to hold its own Brown Lung tests.

For years the employers have done nothing about Brown Lung, why all of a sudden are they now interested in testing workers?'

An NUTW spokesperson said: 'We wonder when the Textile Federation would have started its investigations into the cotton dust disease, Brown Lung, if NUTW had not pressurised so vigorously around this issue.'

'Worker organisations will never stop pushing for the removal of health hazards because in the end it is workers, not employers, that get sick,' he added.



Brown Lung sufferer, Maria Maseko

Court told to reconsider decision

THE crucial battle to win stop order rights for National Union of Textile Workers' members at Table Bay Spinners has taken a new turn.

The Supreme Court of the Western Cape has told the industrial court to reconsider its earlier decision not to grant stop order rights.

The NUTW has been forced to go to the courts because the textile industry of the Western Cape operates a closed shop.

In terms of the closed shop only members of Norman Daniels' Textile Workers Industrial Union can have stop order rights — any other union must apply for an exemption from

the industrial council agreement.

When NUTW applied for an exemption for its members at Table Bay Spinners, Daniels used his position on the council to block the union.

NUTW then took the issue to the industrial court, but the court refused to overturn the industrial council's decision. This led to the union's Supreme Court appeal.

More than just stop order rights for Table Bay workers is at stake in these cases.

NUTW's membership in the Western Cape textile industry is rapidly expanding and, as a result, workers at many more

factories will be seeking exemption from the council's closed shop.

A clear order from the industrial court for the Table Bay Spinners' workers will make it easier for other workers to get stop order rights.

Meanwhile, in Natal the NUTW is waiting for the clothing industry's industrial council to decide whether it will allow clothing workers to decide in a secret ballot which union they want to be members of.

Towards the end of last year, workers at James North, a Pinetown clothing factory, won an exemption from the indus-

try's closed shop which forces all workers to belong to TUCSA's Garment Workers Industrial Union..

Now, workers from at least five other clothing factories have joined NUTW and also want to be exempted from the closed shop.

It has been suggested to the industrial council, that a ballot be held in the factories where NUTW has membership and if it proves to be the majority union then its members should automatically be granted exemptions.

The clothing industry's council is due to make its decision on March 14.

TUCSA unions fail to block NUTW

TUCSA unions attending the Congress of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation failed to win support for a resolution barring the National Union of Textile Workers from 'poaching' their members.

This is the second time that the TUCSA unions have attempted to get the international to intervene in the ongoing

struggle between NUTW and TUCSA's garment and textile unions.

In 1983 during a visit to South Africa by the international's president and general secretary, the TUCSA unions accused NUTW of 'disrupting and dividing' established unions and called on the ITGLWF to intervene.

At the October Congress,

which was held in Israel, it was decided to refer the 'South African problem' to the next ITGLWF Executive Committee meeting.

However, NUTW general secretary, John Copelyn, said: 'Leading opinion at the Congress felt that the TUCSA affiliates shouldn't rely on the international to solve their problems for them.'

NUTW pointed out to the Congress that the TUCSA unions had sweated with employers, had blocked the union's entry onto industrial councils and had abused the closed shop.

On top of this, TUCSA had called for the banning of unregistered unions and for the prosecution of illegal strikers, NUTW told Congress delegates.

Patons moves to Bophuthatswana

BRITISH multinational, Coats Patons, has decided to close its two Randfontein factories, lay off all the workers, and then reopen in Bophuthatswana where it can expect to pay its new employees a quarter of the wages.

In 1983, the two factories, JP Coats and Patons & Baldwin, were the centre of a battle between the National Union of Textile Workers and Evelyn Selora's splinter union.

In a secret ballot the majority of the 400 workers voted in favour of NUTW and since then the union has built up tremendous worker solidarity at the

factories.

Senior shop steward, Vusi Mavuso in an interview with FOSATU Worker News accused the company of moving in order to escape being 'pestered by FOSATU'.

Bophuthatswana's labour legislation bars South African-based unions from operating on their territory.

'People are very upset about the closing of the factories and at the moment relations between management and the workers are very bad,' he said.

'Those that have 30 years' service feel that their sweat has built up the company and all

they have to show for it are lousy watches,' he added.

Brother Mavuso said that the company had only given them a 'wishy washy excuse' about the move being necessary because other companies were undercutting them.

'But I do not think this is true,' he said.

The company's 'retrenchment plan' began during the first quarter of this year and will take about 18 months to complete.

It has offered to pay workers one-and-a-half-week's wages for each year of service in severance pay.

'But it's a payment of money and that's the end of it. No more jobs,' said NUTW general secretary, John Copelyn.

'The company has now got rid of all the risks and can now reap the benefits of a name made by the sweat of South African workers,' he added.

Brother Copelyn said that Patons & Baldwin had not consulted with the union on the decision to close it had only discussed the details of the severance pay agreement.

Is this the kind of investment which is supposed to benefit the workers in South Africa?