

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



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SARMCOL's twelve major shareholders' eyes must have nearly popped out when representatives of the Metal and Allied Workers Union walked into their annual meeting in Johannesburg recently.

In an unusual strategy, MAWU purposely bought 10 Sarmcol shares in order to attend the shareholders meeting.

At the meeting, MAWU organiser, Dumisane Mbanjwa, handed out a document detailing the union's grievances.

The statement says, 'Unfortunately we are well aware that many of you will just dismiss our attendance of this meeting as a gimmick to gain attention — merely another irresponsible act by politically motivated unions.'

'This attitude does and will cause suffering and hardship for all in South Africa.'

Sad state

'We are here because we believe that as shareholders of a British company operating in South Africa you should hear our side of the sad state of the industrial relations at your Sarmcol plant in Howick,' the statement says.

It continues to inform

the shareholders that in the 11-year history of MAWU, Sarmcol 'is a legend of struggle and bitterness.'

'We sometimes think that management are proud of such a record of keeping the union out for so long.'

The statement accuses Sarmcol of having never negotiated a recognition agreement constructively.

'In fact at the outset, recognition negotiations only started because of an out-of-court settlement.'

'Since that time all efforts by the union to secure a fair agreement with reasonable dispute settlement procedures have failed,' the statement adds.

Poverty wages

The statement goes on to discuss the wages earned by workers at the Howick plant which it says are 'far below' poverty scales.

'Are production workers really supposed to believe that there are no funds available of any sort to take basic wages above starvation levels,' the statement says.

The MAWU statement concludes by saying, 'At present the union is firmly resolved to sell its shares after this meeting because our members would not feel happy or morally secure in holding shares in a

Union tells shareholders Sarmcol is 'a legend of bitterness and struggle'

British company that had such an attitude to South Africa's social, economic

and political plight.' At the meeting, the chairman of the company's

Board of Directors said he would take the matter up with the relevant managers.

May day march — Uniply fires them all!

IN one of the most severest cases of union bashing in recent times, Barlow Rand company, Uniply, fired its entire workforce rather than settle a dispute with the Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union.

The dispute arose when on May Day, the Uniply workers decided at a lunch-time meeting to celebrate this Workers' Day by marching singing out of the factory gates when they had finished work.

At 5.15pm the workers, all wearing FOSATU May Day stickers, gathered at one point in the factory premises.

They asked one of the night-shift shop stewards to clock their cards while they all marched out of the gates.

While clocking the cards the PWAWU shop steward was stopped by management and sent back to work.

A few hours later, he was

told to leave the factory premises and return the next day for an inquiry.

As soon as he left work, the night shift downed tools demanding that the shop steward be brought back.

Uniply management refused.

After an hour the workers returned to work but staged a go-slow.

The next day management added fuel to the workers' anger by firing one of the night shift stewards for 'causing the stoppage' and issued warnings to the other two for taking part in the stoppage.

Uniply then fired the shop steward chairman and treasurer, Moses Mkhize and Johannes Msiya, for their part in the May Day march.

Workers saw this as a deliberate attempt by the company to smash the union so they went on strike on May 3.

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Singing Uniply workers outside the Cato Ridge factory.

Uniply workers fired

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They returned to work at midday when management agreed to hold appeal hearings to review the sacking of the four shop stewards.

At the hearings, Uniply decided to take back Brothers Mkhize and Msiya after giving them final warnings.

However, they refused to take back the two night-shift shop stewards.

During the next week the workers went on strike on two occasions while the union attempted to settle the dispute.

Go-slow

But when management threatened to dismiss workers if they took part in any more stoppages, the workers decided to change tactics and instead started a go-slow.

On Monday May 14, management told night shift workers to clean the machines and go home.

When the day shift arrived they found the factory gates locked and a contingent of police with dogs waiting for them.

A PWAU organiser said that rather than stay outside with the police and the dogs, workers decided to storm the gates.

Four options

However, management called the police into the factory in order to get the workers out, she said.

Later that day, PWAU was told that all the workers had been suspended on full pay.

Uniply management said they were now considering four options – either close the factory; retrench most of the workers; fire all the workers; or solve the problems with the union.

On Friday May 18, Uniply made its decision – it decided to fire all the workers.

Since then the 450 workers have been meeting every week in a local hall.

Dirty tactics

The union, in the meantime, has launched an application for the temporary reinstatement of the workers and an application for a Conciliation Board to discuss the dispute.

The Barlow Rand Shop Stewards Council has also been informed of the plight of the Uniply workers and has been asked to pressurise Barlow Rand to take the workers back.

A PWAU spokesperson said, 'Clearly this is one of the ways Barlows is developing to deal with unions – to get rid of all the workers, like Uniply.'

She called on workers to 'unite and fight the bosses' dirty tactics'.

Motorvia workers strike blow against exploitation

AFTER a five-day strike in May, workers at Motorvia near Pine-town have won major changes in their wages and working conditions.

Motorvia, is a car ferry company which employs drivers to take new cars and trucks to various parts of the country.

Previously, the workers had been paid according to the 'trip rate' system.

This meant that the drivers were paid according to where they were driving to, not according to the time spent on the road.

Shortly after the Transport and General Workers Union had organised the Motorvia drivers, it pointed out to the company that this practice did

not comply with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

This Act states that workers must be paid a basic weekly wage, overtime wages and it limits the hours of overtime.

TGWU's branch secretary, John Mawbey said the 'trip rate' system was one of the most exploitative wage systems in the transport industry.

He said the union had threatened to take Motorvia to the Supreme Court in order to compel it to comply with the Act.

'However, the company responded by trying to get exemptions from the Act through its employers' association – behind the union's back,' he said.

'Unfortunately for them, the

department of Manpower had been informed of the situation by the union and had been asked to inform TGWU if any exemption application was made,' Brother Mawbey said.

He added that only after this had failed did Motorvia finally begin negotiating working conditions with TGWU.

But they continued to start talks and then they would stall, he said.

'This car was one the company was not keen to get on the road,' Brother Mawbey said.

Workers were fed up with the lack of progress and on May 7 decided to refuse to start work.

For the entire five days, the Motorvia workers stayed united

– not a crack appeared in their ranks.

In settling the issue with the union, the company agreed to give the drivers a 20 percent increase and has agreed to pay them according to the number of hours worked.

Motorvia has also agreed to negotiate a recognition agreement and grievance and disciplinary procedures with the TGWU.

Brother Mawbey said the strike struck a blow against the 'highly exploitative' trip rate system.

He added that TGWU was fast becoming a major force in the car ferry industry as it dominated both the Eastern Province and Natal.



TGWU's Mike Gwamanda leads the Motorvia workers on their march back to work.

PWAU steps up its fight against hard-nosed bosses by joining a industrial council

THE Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union has decided to join the industrial council for pulp and paper industry in order to step up its fight against the hard-nosed paper bosses.

This change of strategy comes after a long history of battle between the union and the paper employers.

The employers initially refused to grant PWAU any rights unless it joined the industrial council.

A union organiser said that at that stage PWAU had less than 1 000 members in the industry and had not been prepared to even consider joining the council.

'After a long struggle in the Transvaal employers started signing recognition agreements with the union and at Carlton and Nampak these agreements even gave PWAU the right to negotiate wages outside of the industrial council,' she said.

But by the beginning of 1984, the union's membership has shot up to about 7 000 of which

4 000 are in the pulp and paper industry.

'This means that PWAU has more than three times as many members as all the other unions sitting on the council put together,' the organiser said.

On top of this, the union has also won a majority membership in five out of the six paper mills in the major Mondi group, which makes over half of South Africa's paper.

Now the sixth Mondi factory in Bellville has been organised giving PWAU an overall 70 percent majority in the group as a whole.

Given this position of strength, worker members of PWAU began to reconsider the earlier strategy of boycotting the industrial council.

The PWAU organiser said the issue was widely discussed especially at the newly-formed Mondi Shop Stewards' Council and the Pulp and Paper Shop Stewards' Council.

Finally at the National Executive Committee held on May 18 and 19, it was decided to enter the council.

The PWAU organiser said that the union had put forward eight conditions regarding their joining the council, four of which were partially met.

She said the union would continue its fight for the right to plant-level negotiations.

'PWAU also insists that it should receive more seats than the minority unions on the industrial council.'

The decision to join the council has paved the way for the solving of the wage dispute between the union and Mondi.

The union organiser said that during this month PWAU and Mondi would be negotiating interim wage increases in the form of house-agreements.

And in October, for the first time black workers will be represented in the council's wage negotiations by PWAU – this will be for the January 1985 wage increases.

Hostels not fit for pigs

SHELL subsidiary, Protea Asphalt recently attempted to get its workers to clean and repair an old hostel which workers described as 'not fit for pigs'.

And then dismissed the group of contract workers when they refused.

A Chemical Workers Industrial Union organiser said the company had told the workers that they would be moving to a new hostel near their working site.

'One afternoon they were taken to this 'new' hostel and found that there was no electricity, no water, no washing facilities and the doors and windows were broken,' she said.

'The place was filthy and had been used as a toilet,' she added.

The organiser said the workers had then been told to clean up the place.

'Naturally, they refused,' she said.

The management then suspended the workers and later dismissed them 'for refusing to carry out an instruction'.

The CWIU has consulted lawyers and has taken the matter up with Protea Asphalt – negotiations are still proceeding.