

German chemical unionists visit South Africa's workers



IG Chemie's Bernd Leibfried (right) and Horst Metke.

TWO top officials from the German chemical union, IG Chemie, recently visited South Africa at the invitation of FOSATU's Chemical Workers Industrial Union. The IG Chemie has 650 000 members in the paper, chemical, ceramic, glass, rubber and petrol industries. During their two-week visit, Bernd Leibfried, the head of the union's international department, and Horst Metke, head of IG Chemie's collective bargaining department, spoke to chemical and paper workers in the various regions of FOSATU.

Pictured here at a seminar in Natal, the IG Chemie officials explained to shop stewards and union organisers how their union operated. They said that in Germany each industry had only one union which covered both unskilled and skilled workers. As head of the department for collective bargaining, Horst Metke, spoke about the contracts governing wages and working conditions for workers in the chemical industry. These, he said, were negotiated at industry-level. He said that every year, the union had new negoti-

ations covering workers' wages. Workers in the chemical industry were divided into six groups depending on how much training a worker had, Brother Metke said. An unskilled worker, with no training gets R4,50 per hour, he said. 'We do not think that is a very good wage,' he added. Brother Metke said the same wages were paid in the big factories and the small factories. The visitors from the IG Chemie also discussed Germany's labour laws which include the right for unions to strike without threat of dismissal.

Overworked Freight drivers stop work

WORKERS at Freight Forwarding at the City Deep depot in Johannesburg were fed up with the company making the drivers do more and more work under the excuse of 'bad business' so they refused to take their trucks out on May 17 in protest.

Transport and General Workers Union shop steward, Solomon Kekana said in 1983 more trucks were bought by the company and more drivers were hired but no assistants.

'And when assistants were dismissed or left, they were not replaced,' he said.

'The drivers were having to do the driving and then off-load at the other end, often by hand,' he explained.

Brother Kekana said the drivers were 'exhausted' and their complaints were met with 'some excuse or another'.

The stoppage brought management immediately into negotiations.

TGWU organiser, Lydia Kompe said, 'We sat for many hours arguing about the demand, until eventually the workers suggested that they should demonstrate the problem.'

So, the managers were taken outside and shown how packed-up the trucks were.

'Finally, they were convinced and workers returned to work at about two o'clock when man-

agement agreed that every truck should have a driver and two assistants,' she said.

Sister Lydia said the victory was very important 'because it shows other workers that they can fight the attempts of management to get them to work harder, with no extra pay'.

'Management calls it improved productivity but we call it extra exploitation,' she said.

Meanwhile, on the same day as the City Deep stoppage, the workers at Freight Services depot near the Jan Smuts airport also stopped work.

The workers were protesting against bad treatment by their foreman.

TGWU said the shop stewards had been putting complaints to management for months but nothing had been done about it.

So, early on May 17 when a foreman swore at workers, the members of TGWU said 'this is it' and stopped work.

They agreed to go back to work when management promised to see to the grievance.

An investigation led to the foreman being suspended for three days and to him being given a final warning.

'Workers are satisfied that the foreman has learnt a lesson,' a union organiser said.

New Federated Timbers' shop steward council

THE Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union has formed a new Shop Stewards Council to cover all the Federated Timbers' factories organised by the union.

Shop stewards from factories at Mobeeni, Pinetown, Empangeni, Pietermaritzburg and Park Rynie met for the first time on June 10.

The Federated Timbers' Shop Stewards Council represents about 450 workers - it has drawn up joint wage proposals for talks which are due to start in July.

First worker spokesperson for knitting unions

FOR the first time since the formation of the Transvaal knitting industry's industrial council, a worker has been chosen as the spokesperson for the unions.

Over the last 14 years the sole spokesperson for the 2 500 knitting workers has been Dr Anna Scheepers - president of the TUCSA affiliated Garment Workers Union.

Dr Scheepers' union only represents about 30 workers in the entire industry.

Last year when the National Union of Textile Workers applied for membership of the council, this was fiercely opposed by Dr Scheepers.

However, NUTW's court

action forced Dr Scheepers and her union to back-off and allow FOSATU representation on the council.

And this year, for the first time ever, shop stewards of the three unions involved in the council met to discuss a joint strategy.

The joint shop steward caucus unanimously elected NUTW's Norman Ratsidi as chief spokesperson.

Prior to the start of this year's wage talks, the unions presented a joint set of demands to the employers.

So far, three negotiating meetings have been held without any

significant success.

The employers have taken a hard-line on the forthcoming July increase by initially asking for a wage freeze until January 1985.

The workers are demanding a 13 percent wage increase in July, a further 15 percent in January and an 18 percent increase next July.

In negotiations, the employers have claimed that the low wages in decentralised areas have made their goods uncompetitive.

However the workers have countered by saying that they have been working overtime despite the recession and compet-

ition elsewhere.

Besides, in 1983 the workers gave up half of the July increase in order to prevent retrenchment, they said.

The joint union caucus has also demanded protection against dismissal for pregnant women, an industry retrenchment procedure and the doing away of the category of mechanic's assistant - this has been used by firms to avoid paying black mechanics a mechanic's wage.

The negotiating team anticipates tough negotiations ahead but believes if the unions stick together their objectives will be achieved.

500 Brewery workers demand higher wages

TOWARDS the end of last month about 500 workers at the Port Natal Administration Board's Congella Brewery stopped work in support of their demand for higher wages.

The eight-hour stoppage also affected depots and bottle stores owned by the brewery.

The Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union over the past few months has been attempting to negotiate wages with the PNAB but has been told that only the Minister of Co-operation and Development, Dr Piet Koornhof, can agree to wage increases.

Brewery workers said, 'This is unacceptable to us. We are being

paid poverty wages. We are sick and tired of the PNAB hiding behind the Minister.'

They said that their union had been recognised and 'we therefore demand the right to negotiate wages right inside the factory'.

The workers returned to work when management assured them that they had sent a telex to the Minister asking him to take urgent action on the workers' demands.

Recently, SFAWU was told that the PNAB would be sending a delegation to the Minister to discuss the issue of wage increases.

Sexual harassment leads to Isithebe metal strikes

SEXUAL harassment at an Isithebe metal factory, Kempar, sparked off a near general strike in the area last month.

Workers at Kempar at the end of April decided to approach management following reports from women workers that an induna was forcing them to have sex with him.

However, Kempar's manager told Metal and Allied Workers Union shop stewards that he was not prepared to fire the induna.

Furthermore, the manager said that workers not happy with the induna were free to leave the company.

When shop stewards reported back, an argument broke out between one woman worker and other workers.

The shop steward chairman intervened and stopped the fight and managed to get workers to return to work.

But half-an-hour later the police arrived, accompanied by management, and arrested 18 workers.

When the Kempar workers later heard that the 18 workers who had been arrested, including the shop steward chairman, had been fired by the company, they all stopped work.

After attempts by MAWU to resolve the issue with Kempar failed, workers at seven Isithebe factories downed tools in sympathy.

Unfortunately, the sympathy strike failed to break through to the hard-headed Kempar management and workers eventually

were forced to return to work.

Sexual harassment and other malpractices are rife in decentralised industrial areas, like Isithebe

Management take advantage of the fact that workers in the 'homelands' are not protected by South Africa's labour laws.

Under South African legislation, MAWU would have been able to take up an 'unfair labour practice' case against Kempar.

But in Isithebe, because it falls under KwaZulu, workers have no legal protection.

However, MAWU is at present investigating legal action against Kempar's induna.

And FOSATU is seriously examining the position of workers in the 'homelands' and so-called independent states.