

Legal strike

AT 7.45 am on Tuesday April 30 some 700 day shift workers at British-owned BTR Sarmcol left their machines and went and sat down in the canteen. About 200 night shift workers later joined them.

The workers had had enough. For two years they have been trying to get the bosses at this Howick factory to sign a simple union recognition agreement.

Short strikes, threatened court action, mediation, a conciliation board and an overtime ban have been unable to persuade management to get a move on and sign the agreement.

Numerous recognition agreements similar to the one on the table at Sarmcol have been signed at FOSATU organised factories.

And a Barlows company has found this particular agreement so acceptable that it has handed it over to a union as the starting point for recognition discussions.

So, what has been the hold up? Metal and Allied Workers Union shop stewards, Pheneas Sibiyi and Philip Dladla, told

FOSATU Worker News that management saw the strike clause as a 'big problem'.

'In order to give workers some protection, we have demanded that during a legal strike the company must not selectively hire or fire, and in a wildcat strike, the union must be given a certain period to sort out the problem before management takes any action,' they said.

'But, management accused us of trying to take away their power and give it to the workers,' the shop stewards said.

This reaction is surprising coming from a British company — workers in Britain are able to strike without any fear of dismissal.

'We have been negotiating this recognition agreement since June 1983. It's been too long. So, when the conciliation board failed we gave management five days to sign the agreement. When we got no positive response, we decided to go on a legal strike,' the shop stewards said.

Will the strike be a long one? 'Yes, if management won't

Sarmcol workers' patience runs out

sign,' the shop stewards answered. 'Workers won't go back until the agreement is signed.'

The fact that it is a legal strike has made little difference to Sarmcol. Two days after it began, the company fired all the strikers and then locked them out of the factory.

But, the company has not had it all its own way. Attempts to woo back the strikers have been unsuccessful and hiring scabs from the area has proved impossible. Sarmcol has been forced to use white women staff members to operate the fork lift trucks.

The strikers' call for a boycott of all local shops and businesses has been backed by the entire community of Mpophomeni township. In the press, a supermarket owner admitted that his takings had dropped by 50 percent and another said if the boycott continued she would have to close down.

As FOSATU Worker News goes to press, the strike is entering its fourth week, but the company is still refusing to hold any discussions with the union.



Sarmcol workers at one of their daily strike meetings

New deal reduces hours and pays night allowance

THE Transport and General Workers Union recently won a new deal for Anglo American Property Services workers which includes a reduction in working hours and a R1 night shift allowance.

The new deal reduces working hours from 45 to 42,5 hours per week without any loss of pay — a significant step forward in the fight for a shorter working week.

The negotiations which began towards the end of January were held up by the company's refusal to pay a night shift allowance.

However after the issue was referred to mediation, Ampro agreed to pay R1 per shift to all

nightworkers to compensate for the inconvenience of working nights. An extra three day's leave was also granted to nightworkers.

In terms of the new deal:

- all workers will get an 11,5 percent wage increase.
- the pensionable age for women cleaners has been reduced to 60.
- all workers on reaching ten year's service will get a cash benefit of R100.
- workers who are transferred to buildings some distance away from their original place of employment can now apply for a transport allowance.
- the company has also agreed to give most workers a half-day-off on May Day.

NCS Plastics destroys 200 jobs in Pinetown

ANOTHER South African employer is 'running away' to the homelands at the cost of over 200 jobs in the urban area.

Pinetown's largest chemical employer, NCS Plastics, is shutting down its packaging division and moving it to Gazankulu.

In a recent statement, the Chemical Workers Industrial Union said that 'NCS must now be marked as one of apartheid's backers and a full supporter of the bantustanization of our country'.

The union said it was 'nonsensical' for a country to follow a decentralisation policy where the taxpayer faced a double

burden.

'The taxpayer is financing the luxurious incentives offered to industries which relocate and also the cost of providing a new infrastructure and housing in the decentralisation area.'

'At the same time the urban areas with established infrastructure and settled communities like Pinetown have their jobs ripped out of them leaving only the black scars of unsolvable unemployment,' the union statement said.

'The only ones who benefit are profiteers like NCS Plastics who exploit the apartheid system and who are not prepared to face their social responsibilities,' the CWIU concluded.

Sugar wages bettered

THE Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has bettered the wages settled on at the sugar industry's industrial council in its separate negotiations with major sugar employer, C G Smith.

The agreement which covers over 2 000 C G Smith workers

In addition to this, the living-out allowance which is paid to workers who don't live in company hostels has been increased from R30 to R40 per month.

has increased the wages on the lower grades by 15 percent and has hiked the food allowance from R55 to R65 per month.

International squeeze on Transvaal Alloys

INTERNATIONAL pressure on Transvaal Alloys and its German parent company, Nord Deutsche Affinerie, is increasing but it is still refusing to take back the dismissed members of the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

Last year MAWU launched an international campaign against Transvaal Alloys which has won the support of the German chemical union, I G Chemie, and the German government.

After his recent visit to South Africa, I G Chemie's Dieter Honerhoff raised the MAWU dispute at a Supervisory Board meeting of Nord Deutsche Affinerie.

And the German government

has criticised the company for breaking the EEC and ILO Codes of Conduct and has advised it to take back the 200 dismissed workers.

However, the company has told the union that it would only take back the dismissed workers when jobs become available.

A MAWU spokesperson said 'It could take five years before all the workers are taken back.'

Transvaal Alloys has also said that any worker affected by the unhealthy conditions at the Middelburg mine and vanadium plant should just claim from the Workmen's Compensation.

One of MAWU's major com-

plaints against Transvaal Alloys was that many of the workers had become ill from breathing acid fumes and dust because the company provided no proper ventilation or masks.

Meanwhile, Nord Deutsche Affinerie is the centre of a pollution scandal involving its copper refinery in Hamburg, Germany.

Investigations have revealed that for years the refinery has been spewing out a poisonous substance which has spread over most of the city.

'Clearly this company cares nothing for people. If it is not prepared to provide reasonable conditions for workers then it must get out of South Africa,' the MAWU spokesperson said.

Another first for dothing workers

CONTRARY to what TUCSA's Garment Workers Industrial Union (GWIU) believes, factory-floor negotiations have not caused chaos in the clothing industry — instead they have led to new worker rights being won.

Workers at Pinetown factory, James North, were the first clothing workers to be granted an exemption from the industry's closed shop in order to join the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW).

They are now the first cloth-

ing workers to be covered by a retrenchment agreement which pays a severance pay of one week's wages for each year of service.

The TUCSA union opposed NUTW's exemption application arguing that to have negotiations at plant level as well as at the industrial council would cause chaos in the Natal clothing industry.

The GWIU is the only union sitting on the industrial council and it has persistently blocked NUTW's applications to join

the council.

Only through industrial court action was NUTW able to win plant-level negotiating rights for its members at James North.

In terms of the new retrenchment agreement, James North has agreed to: discuss retrenchments with the union; retrench according to the principle of Last In First Out (LIFO); and to take back retrenched workers before employing anybody else.

Worker control in action

IN a demonstration of 'worker control' in action, hundreds of Metal and Allied Workers Union shop stewards were bused to the metal industry's wage talks on May 23.

'We felt we had to take the shop steward chairmen along in order to get a proper mandate,' a MAWU spokesperson said. 'In future, we hope to involve more members.'

A hall was hired right next to where the industrial council negotiations took place and throughout the day the union negotiating team caucused with the shop stewards.

The presence of the shop stewards was a major departure from the usual undemocratic practices of industrial councils.

The wage talks, though, have

once again deadlocked.

The metal employer's offer of a 17c increase on the bottom rate, bringing the minimum up to R1,90, and 40c at the top, has been rejected by the International Metalworkers Federation joint union caucus.

And Seifsa, the metal employer's association, is refusing to hold any further meetings.