

Rely workers win damages from Minister

THIRTY-THREE workers from Rely Precision Castings in Boksburg have been paid R9 575 in damages by the Minister of Police after being assaulted by Boksburg police two years ago.

The outcome of the workers' court action is likely to have an important effect on the way workers are treated by the police.

In fact, union spokesmen say the treatment of workers by police during the recent East Rand strike wave has already changed markedly.

BATONS

The workers sued the Minister for damages after policemen assaulted them with truncheons and batons at the Boksburg police station following a

'Police have been taught a lesson'

strike at the plant in May 1980.

The case was heard in the Boksburg Magistrate's court in January and March this year.

The Minister initially defended the case and lawyers for the defence tried to suggest that the workers had suffered their injuries by falling over in the van which took them to the police station.

WITHDREW

Workers denied this and the defence

withdrew after 14 workers testified about how they had been assaulted.

The parties agreed on the amount of damages to be paid to the workers, and the settlement was made an order of the court.

Unlike an out of court settlement, this means in effect that the Minister has admitted that the police assaulted the workers.

The money was handed over to the

workers at a ceremony at the FOSATU offices in Benoni last month. Most workers received R215, while the worker who had been worst injured was paid R750.

After the ceremony a video film was shown of the play *Ilanga*, which the Rely workers had produced together with the Junction Avenues Theatre Group.

The play depicted the experience of the Rely workers at the factory and during the strike.

LESSON

After the film, workers and organisers discussed the lessons of the strike. Rodney Nwamba, Transvaal secretary of MAWU, pointed out that the police had been taught a lesson as damages

paid out in this way could be recovered from the pay of the policemen involved in the assault.

The strike had also emphasised that contract workers could not simply be thrown away like rubbish, he said.

When the company fired the workers the Administration Board insisted that it should employ local workers.

But these workers did not like working in a foundry and left. The company was therefore forced to re-employ many of the sacked workers, he said.

David Sibabe, MAWU general secretary, said the determination and unity of the Rely workers had been an inspiration to all metal workers on the East Rand.

Metal unrest on East Rand:

Industrial Council exposed

SEVERE unrest has continued in the metal industry with thousands of workers on the East Rand striking for better wages.

The unrest has been related to the annual wage negotiations on the steel and engineering industrial council and worker leaders say the events of the past few months have once again exposed the complete inadequacy of the council.

The Metal and Allied Workers' Union to which many of the workers belong, has refused to join the council because it believes the council cannot deal adequately with worker demands in its present form.

On the other hand, the employers' federation, Seifsa, has refused to negotiate with unions outside the council.

WARNING

In March this year, David Sibabe, general secretary of MAWU, warned employers that they were "sitting on the lid of a volcano".

During 1981, he said, employers were making record profits but workers were not receiving increases in wages to compensate for the rapid rise in prices.

To make matters worse, he added, there had been no planting in the rural areas in December due to lack of rain, so that the families of the many contract workers employed in the metal industry were fully dependent on their wages.

Employers took no notice, saying they would only negotiate on the industrial council. When the negotiations started, employers offered a 25 cents an hour increase for all grades - far below FOSATU's R2 an hour living wage standard.

DELAY

The situation worsened further when the mainly white artisan unions on the council rejected the offer and declared a dispute, thereby delaying wage increases still further.

Workers responded by taking the situation into their own hands. At least ten wage strikes had already taken place on the East Rand before the council negotiations began.

Now, thousands of workers decided they could not wait any longer and downed tools at Haggie Rand, National Bolts, Screentex, Frys Metals, Defy and Scaw Metals.

At several of these factories management either gave or agreed to negotiate increases and workers returned to work.

ANGLO AMERICAN

At Scaw Metals, which is owned by Anglo American, management refused to give any increase at all. Workers did not even put forward the R2 an hour living wage demand but only asked for an immediate 10 cents an hour increase which could be taken off the industrial council increase when that was given.

Scaw management refused, saying this would "pre-empt" the council negotiations.

Shop stewards and union representa-

tives were amazed that a management with a "liberal" image like Anglo American could refuse a 10 cents increase while they had already offered more than that on the council.

Moses Mayekiso said: "Companies have no trouble awarding unilateral wage increases in individual factories when they deadlock with our unions."

"But when unions who don't even represent our workers deadlock the council negotiations, they refuse to do the same. This is bound to reinforce all our members' suspicions of the council."

DISMISSED

Despite prolonged negotiations, Scaw management refused to budge and dismissed the 2 800 workers on strike - which included most black clerical staff. Many contract workers returned home.

A week later about half had returned, but many have yet to come back despite Scaw's undertaking to re-employ.

Rodney Mwamba, MAWU branch secretary in the Transvaal, has said: "It is difficult to understand what 'pre-empting' negotiations means in this situation."

"It is hard to believe that any management could consider refusing the small increase worth all the loss and human suffering this has caused."

AGREEMENT

Unions and employers on the council finally reached agreement on pay increases late this month. Skilled workers will get increases of up to 40 cents an hour but unskilled workers increases from 30 cents an hour.

The new minimum rate will be R1,43 an hour, which falls far short of the FOSATU living wage demand which was already formulated last year.

One black union on the council has refused to accept the agreement and will ask its members whether they want it to withdraw from the council.

DIRTY WORD

"The metal industrial council is already a dirty word among workers," a worker leader has said.

"Now, they have been shown even more clearly how ridiculously inadequate the council is."



A group of workers with a banner at MAWU's annual general meeting held in the Wattville Stadium on May Day.

'MAWU must build leadership'

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had been organised.

Because of this expansion and the recent wave of strikes, organisers were often too busy to train shop stewards who in some cases were left to face management on their own.

Consolidation was essential if MAWU's members were to be adequately served, he said.

In his branch report for Southern Natal, Jeff Schreiner also welcomed the great progress made last year but said this year was likely to be a much more difficult one for workers.

TOUGHER

Bosses were becoming more experienced and tougher in dealing with unions. Also the economy was less active than before, and retrenchments and attacks on unions could be expected to increase.

June-Rose Nala from Southern Natal described the great steps forward taken in the area. When MAWU had started organising, she said, workers were getting 35 cents an hour.

Now, wages had been forced up and about 10 000 workers were organised in FOSATU unions.

However, she added that much work remained to be done as complete agreements had still not been signed in many factories.

FUTURE TASK

MAWU general secretary, David Sibabe, examined the union's task in the future.

"Our main duty now," he said, "is to

build a strong leadership with clear political understanding. Without clear leadership we shall be blamed by our grandchildren for not directing the working class movement.

"We need to consolidate our organisation and have a stable membership so that we can build a disciplined unity inside MAWU based on FOSATU's principles.

"Leadership, consolidation and dis-

ciplined unity should be our motto for the next year," he said.

WORKER UNITY

He added: "May 1 is a secret date on the calendar of the working class. It is the day that represents workers' struggle, workers' hope and workers' unity."

"We celebrate May 1 in the sombre knowledge that workers and their unions are everywhere under pressure."



DAVID Sibabe addressing the meeting... "workers and unions are everywhere under pressure".

Workers oppose new tactic

IN a disturbing new trend, several managements on the East Rand attempted to replace striking African workers with "coloureds" during the recent strike wave in the area.

Companies which tried to break strikes in this way included Flexor, Hawker Siddeley and National Spring.

PLEDGE

Workers in affected factories have pledged to oppose this tactic, which

seems aimed at creating divisions among workers and weakening their organisation.

The Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) and FOSATU are now so strong in the Wadeville area that managements have found it very difficult to recruit "scab" labour to break strikes.

At Metal and Chemical Industries, for example, the company attempted to

recruit scab labour from the pass office on the morning of the strike.

RAN AWAY

These workers were not told they were being brought in to break the strike. When the truckload of new recruits arrived and saw the striking workers outside the factory, they all jumped out and ran away.

The company then began negotiating with MAWU.

During the strike at National Spring the Katlehong shop stewards' council decided to use its community contacts to prevent scabs from taking the striking workers' jobs.

This was so successful that the company started recruiting "coloured" workers - who were not familiar with MAWU or FOSATU - a week later.

Striking workers then realised they would have to return. However, they are determined not to fall into the management trap of dividing workers by race, and are starting a recruitment campaign among the "coloured" workers that have been employed.