

Transport workers fired for collecting scraps of labels

FREIGHT Services in the Transvaal recently fired two union activists and accused the Transport and General Workers Union of being involved in 'industrial espionage'.

This heavy-handed action by the company occurred after the union decided to investigate complaints by the workers of chest problems and rashes.

TGWU general secretary, Jane Barrett said the problems mainly affected the workers whose job it was to clean out the big transport containers.

'We raised the issue with the workers and it was felt that we should take those effected to a doctor to try and find out the seriousness of the complaints,' she said.

Four workers were taken to the Health Information Centre and examined by a doctor.

Sister Barrett said the doctor had said that he needed to find out what chemicals the workers were using to clean and what chemicals were being cleaned out of the containers.

'So we asked the workers to

collect scraps of labels to find this information out for the doctor,' she said.

The union also raised health and safety at the monthly meeting with the management and asked that workers be given protective clothing.

'Management responded by saying that they needed a list of what we required.

'So we continued our investigations which would enable the union to put forward worthwhile recommendations,' Sister Barrett said.

The next day, Sister Barrett said that she had gone to the depot to collect the label scraps from a shop steward and a member who had collected them all.

Shortly after she had left the plant these two workers were told they had been fired for 'theft and disloyalty to the company'.

The TGWU took the dismissals up in accordance with the appeal procedure but management wouldn't budge.

At the meeting, management

threatened to report the TGWU to the companies importing the chemicals and suggested that the union was involved in 'industrial espionage'.

Sister Barrett said the company's attitude was 'absurd' considering the workers' reason for collecting the scraps of labels.

The TGWU decided to take the matter to the Industrial Court.

In papers delivered to the company the union said that the firing of the workers was an unfair labour practice as the investigation of chemicals had been done solely to investigate the working conditions.

Before the matter could come before the court, Freight Services agreed to take back the two workers with three weeks back-pay for the time they had been out of work.

'We also got a commitment from the company to discuss health and safety and it agreed to give to the union the names of the chemicals the workers were cleaning with,' Sister Barrett said.

Criticism of new migrant contract continues

THERE is mounting opposition to moves by the metal industry's employers' association, SEIFSA, to bring in a new contract for migrant workers.

Since the Metal and Allied Workers Union's attack on SEIFSA for changing the contract without any consultation with the workers, both the Council of Unions of SA (CUSA) and the Black Sash have slammed the metal employers' association.

The new contract will enable metal employers to fire migrant workers with only a days notice.

Up to now migrant workers have been given a certain amount of security by the yearly contract — in terms of which it is extremely difficult for employers to fire a migrant worker in the middle of his contract.

However, as migrant workers now prepare for the Christmas shutdown, they are being given contracts with a new stamp on them.

The stamp says that the contract 'shall be for a period of 12 months in its entirety and which shall consist of an initial period of one month and thereafter be continued on a daily basis with one day's notice required to terminate the contract'.

SEIFSA has made this move in order to prevent legal action against employers who retrench migrant workers in mid-contract.

MAWU is at present contemplating legal action against Krost

Brothers for dismissing shop steward, Jethro Mkhize, in the middle of his contract.

In a recent press statement, CUSA criticised SEIFSA for 'attempting to jeopardise normal employment conditions and destabilise the industry by this action'.

Black Sash national president, Sheena Duncan, in a letter to the Rand Daily Mail said 'it is beyond belief that SEIFSA so callously, and without consultation with the workers, has conspired with the Government to remove one miserable protection migrant workers enjoyed.'

In reply to these criticisms, the director of SEIFSA said that the new move was to place migrant workers on the same basis as 'white, coloured and Asian workers and black workers with Section 10 1 (a) and (b) rights'.

However, he forgets that because of the evil migrant labour system, migrant workers do not enjoy the same 'privileges' as these workers.

Losing a job for a migrant worker means being shipped back to the 'homelands' where both poverty and the drought reign supreme.

Meanwhile, MAWU and other independent unions are gearing themselves up to resist the introduction of the new contract.



After hearing of the success of the worker culture day held in the Transvaal, the Natal Region decided to hold its own. The Dunlop play was once again the main event but the Frame choir (left) and the group, Abafana Bomoya, also performed (below right).



FOSATU FUN DAY IN NATAL