

FOSATU WORKER NEWS

Federation of South African Trade Unions



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The B & S workers at their last meeting. Their struggle will always be remembered.

THEY'RE BACK!

B & S workers return to work after an out-of-court settlement

IT'S OVER! The 260 B & S Engineering workers who have remained united for over a year, are back at work.

Since September last year, the B & S workers have resisted selective re-employment in the belief that one day they would win.

The workers said on September 9 last year management had come into the factory, switched off the machines and told them they had all been dismissed.

They said they were told that the next day they could apply for selective re-employment.

But this group of workers refused and every day since then they have met in a local church hall to discuss their struggle.

Things were not easy for them.

In an interview with FOSATU Worker News in May, the workers committee said some were starving and that most had been forced to sell their cattle

and other possessions in order to survive.

'But we learnt that by being alone nothing could happen and that the only way was to stick together. We are all suffering and sacrificing.'

During the past year, the dispute has drawn considerable interest from local and overseas newspapers which have carried interviews with the B & S workers.

With the support of the Metal and Allied Workers Union, the workers decided that they would take the company to the Industrial Court for its unfair labour practices.

The workers asked the court to order their re-instatement and put forward a back-pay claim of over

R850 000 - the biggest ever to come before the court.

But before the case could come before the court the company settled with the union - just over a year after the workers were originally dismissed.

A joint statement revealed that the company had agreed to take back the 260 workers.

It said that a 'satisfactory' relationship would now be established between MAWU and the company.

However, nothing was said about the back-pay claim and a secrecy clause in the agreement bars the union from revealing anything to the media (or FOSATU Worker News) beyond the statement.

It is unlikely, though, that the B & S workers would agree to the settlement unless the company had made an effort towards meeting their back-pay claim.

On September 26 all the workers went back to work at B & S Engineering at Brits.

Another Brits dispute was also resolved last month after a week-long strike at Firestone.

The Firestone workers returned to work after the company agreed to give them a productivity linked increase ranging from 10c to 3c.

It also agreed to form a joint management-union committee to examine the present unsatisfactory inc-

entive-based wage system with a view to changing it to a measured day work system.

The company further agreed to negotiate future wage increases with a National Automobile and Allied Workers Union committee.

The strike was sparked off when Firestone declared a unilateral wage increase for August.

The local townships are buzzing with the news of these two successes so it is likely that FOSATU organisation in this 'border' area will really take off.

Hopefully employers in the area will take a close look at these two disputes which have laid the basis for stable labour relations practices in both companies.

Previous Brits employer practices left much to be desired with companies firing union activists and calling in the police to 'solve' labour disputes.