

## LEYLAND : WERE THE WORKERS VICTIMISED BY MANAGEMENT?

Workers at Leyland Motor Corporation of South Africa Limited in Mcbeni have been faced with many problems since a letter was sent them to the management calling for a referendum to be organised where the workers, their Union official Mr Alpheus Mthethwa, and the management would discuss the workers' grievances.

In this letter the workers made it clear that they believed it was important to have good communication between workers and management in the factory. However, management decided not to answer this letter and it was only four days later, after workers had approached management and asked if they had any reply, that the manager, Mr Lipp, said that he was not interested in discussing the workers' proposals with them. (He said that the workers could choose to do whatever they wanted but that he would not change his decision). So the attempt by the workers to bring themselves and management together for talks had been stopped by the power of the management to do as they wished. This happened on Friday 1st March.

### WORK STOPS

On Monday of the following week the workers decided to stop working, as all their negotiation attempts had failed. (The manager was asked to think again about the workers' request for a referendum. They also refused to restart work until the management agreed to negotiate with them). On Tuesday all the workers returned to the factory and awaited a reply from management, On the same afternoon they were fired. Mr Mthethwa phoned the manager in an attempt to try and get the manager to change his mind. The manager said "No". He said that he was not prepared to discuss the matter with a Union organiser because he believed that the Union did not have anything to do with his factory. But all the workers at Leyland are members of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union. The organised workers inside the factory are the Union and the organiser is employed by the workers to help them to negotiate proposals, like the referendum put forward by workers in the factory. The organiser attempted to bring down the head of Leyland Corporation, Lord Stokes, from Johannesburg to settle this dispute. He refused to interfere.

All this time the management was in contact with the Department of Labour. They were prepared to listen to people who are organised by the Government but they were not prepared to speak to the workers or their organiser. It was this same Dept of Labour official who advised the manager to fire the workers and obviously the manager listened to him.

The next day, Wednesday, all the workers who had been fired met at James Bolton Hall with their Union Secretary to discuss what could be done. Mr Mthethwa phoned Leyland head office in Johannesburg and was told that Dr F.P. Jacobsz was to come to Durban and try to settle their grievances. He did come and met with Mr Mthethwa and Mrs Harriet Bolton (Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union). It was agreed at this meeting that all those workers who were fired would be re-employed and that the workers would elect shop stewards to represent them. Dr Jacobsz said then (at that time) that the Union was welcome to meet management to discuss matters which were of interest and concern to both management and workers.

### THE AGREEMENT IS SIGNED

The workers met with Dr. Jacobsz outside the factory and an agreement was signed by them (the workers and Dr. Jacobsz). The condition of this agreement as put forward by the workers and accepted by him was

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that all workers would be re-employed and that they did not have to form a Works Committee or a Liaison Committee but would appoint six Shop Stewards to represent them. Dr. Jacobsz' condition was that he would only negotiate with those Shop Stewards who were Leyland workers and would not discuss matters with the Union Shop Stewards. The workers agreed to this condition and returned to work on Monday 11th March.

On Wednesday Dr. Jacobsz returned to Durban and told the six Shop Stewards that because the strikes in Britain had slowed down the importing of materials for the factory, management had decided to retrench (i.e. fire) sixty-five workers. While he was talking to these Shop Stewards, the Durban manager dismissed twenty-one workers. (Then Dr. Jacobsz, who had signed the agreement which acknowledged the Shop Stewards as the workers' representatives refused to allow these Shop Stewards to talk to their fellow workers!) The workers at Leyland, and Union officials, believe that management were dishonest with them and that they, the workers, had been victimized. Management also fired all the best Union leaders. Those workers who are still working at Leyland say that since the firing of their fellows they have suddenly started working a lot of overtime.

If there was so little work that 65 people had to be retrenched why so much overtime? It seems as if they are doing the extra work which would have been done by those who were fired. (Some of the workers had been working at Leyland and making profits for the company for eight to ten years.)

#### ANOTHER MEMORANDUM

After the mass firing or what management called retrenchment, workers drew up another memorandum and sent it to the management. They repeated their desire to have good communication and honest discussion with management. In the letter they said that if management was sincere in its dealings with the workers, they should re-employ all the workers they had fired and that if work was slack, as management had said it was, then workers were prepared to sacrifice their salaries by working short shifts so that there could be work for everyone. (They said that this decision concerned only themselves as workers, and that the management had nothing to lose). Dr Jacobsz replied to the workers and said that management had considered this short shift proposal but had decided that, for "economic reasons", it was not possible. This argument is unconvincing when we look at what has taken place at Leyland over the past few weeks, especially when we note (or remember) that four of the six Shop Stewards were among those who were fired.

But workers at Leyland have not been discouraged (or disheartened) and are continuing to struggle for recognition by management to discuss mutually the problem of wages and working conditions.

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