

## Sasol Update: the Struggle Continues

The company is currently selectively re-employing the 5-6,000 workers dismissed in November. Some 2,513 out of 4,300 applicants had been re-employed by the end of January (Rand Daily Mail 29.1.85), with some workers having already received rejection letters. The Chemical Workers Industrial Union is continuing to oppose victimisation and has called on workers in South Africa and overseas for solidarity action. As a result of pressure, management began negotiating with the union again in December. However there has been an increase in minor harassment. Racist leaflets have been distributed attacking white union officials - with no effect on workers - and the Branch Secretary, Chris Bonner, was arrested for attending a union meeting in Embalenhle without a permit.

The Sasol question is coming to a head at a time when trade unions in the USA are preparing for a major conference on South Africa, and US companies are already coming under pressure. The American-based company, Fluor is undertaking construction work at Sasol's Secunda complex. Fluor's presence has been condemned by the United Mine Workers of America who point out that the company - a co-sponsor of the Sullivan Principles - has been involved in the construction of "racial housing", the hostels for black male workers who are not allowed to bring their families with them. In addition it is now rumoured that Fluor allowed its workers to be used by Sasol in order to keep the plant going after the November dismissals.

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Since the dismissals the following actions were taken by the CWIU in their campaign for reinstatement:

1. FOSATU and other unions were called upon to support Sasol workers. Regional meetings were held all over South Africa:
  - a) Shop stewards from organised plants were asked to

approach their employers to pressurise Sasol. This was done quite widely.

- b) Many pension funds have shares in Sasol. Many union members belong to these funds, eg. the Metal Industry Pension Fund. Shop stewards were requested to put pressure on the Boards of Trustees to pressurise Sasol for reinstatement.
2. Press publicity and pamphlets were used to inform membership and general public of the true story of the Sasol dismissals.
  3. International pressure:
    - a) the ICEF (International Chemical Energy Federation) were contacted. They in turn informed all affiliates worldwide. Many responded by sending telegrams to Sasol and to the Minister. Where there are direct contacts with Sasol by overseas companies particular pressure was put on them by the unions organised in such plants.
    - b) FOSATU General Secretary personally visited ICFTU who in turn informed national centres affiliated to them.
    - c) CWIU Transvaal Branch Chairperson visited the USA and rallied support from unions and protest groups.
  4. Transvaal Branch of CWIU:
    - a) Branch meetings were held every Saturday in November /December to plan action and monitor progress.
    - b) Shop stewards maintained contact, attended the meetings and assisted organisers in Secunda.
    - c) Shop stewards were sent to homeland areas to give support and information to dismissed workers.
    - d) General meetings for Sasol workers were held. Meetings were attended by dismissed workers from the township and membership who were not dismissed.
    - e) Sasol mineworkers were active and achieved a majority membership of the union. Management were approached and stop orders submitted for verification.
    - f) Workers from far flung areas maintained contact with the union. In many areas groups of Sasol workers were formed in the "homelands".

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5. Unions involved in the Unity talks were asked for support. In December, 24 unions submitted a letter of demand to Sasol Management demanding:
- a) Negotiation with the CWIU
  - b) Reinstatement of the workers

Sasol management responded by inviting CWIU to a meeting. Two meetings were held at which no settlement was reached. In particular the union could not accept the management's criteria for re-employment, ie. "intimidators" would be excluded.

The union, supported by the Unity unions submitted an application for a Conciliation Board to the Minister on 10 January 1985; should the Minister refuse to appoint the Board the way will be open for national legal industrial action by all the unions. The decision whether or not to go forward with such action will be taken after meeting Sasol management at the end of January.

(CWIU communique January 1985)