

Allied Publishing - Round Two

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The strike of the Allied Publishing workers in the Transvaal which took place from 21-24 November, received wide publicity and generated much discussion. Due to various misunderstandings and to certain misleading statements from a number of quarters during and after the strike, certain misconceptions arose with regard to the strike. This memorandum is an attempt to clarify the events which took place leading up to, during and following the strike.

After Allied workers had organised themselves into the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) during mid 1978, a lengthy struggle to gain recognition of the Union by the Company ensued. On a number of occasions the struggle brought Allied Workers to the verge of strike action. Eventually on the 10th April, 1980 an agreement was reached which led to substantial wage increases for Allied Workers plus recognition of the Union and the introduction of a shop steward system (See SALB Vol. 5 No.8 and WIP 12 of 1980)

The discontent amongst the Allied Workers built up after the Company's Johannesburg Area Manager began to treat workers in an abusive and belligerent manner. Matters came to a head 10 days before the strike, when this Area Manager dismissed three workers in a manner which their colleagues considered to be unfair. In addition, he allegedly assaulted one of those workers while in the process of dismissing him. The shop stewards at the Branch where these dismissals occurred met to discuss what action they should take. They eventually decided that the matter should be discussed with the other shop stewards at a meeting on the 19th November which management had called to discuss driver training. The response of the Depot shop stewards was not to condone possible misdemeanours by Union members, but to object to instant dismissals being carried out without their knowledge. They had attempted to discuss the matter with the Area Manager, but he had chased them away. Furthermore, the CCAWUSA General Secretary, Ms Emma Mashinini, had contacted the Area Manager's superiors, he, however, had supported the action taken.

When the Depot shop stewards met with other Allied Worker leaders to discuss the issue, the entire group decided that they should boycott management's meeting and instead proceed to the Union offices to hold their own meeting. Here the shop stewards decided that given management's uncooperative attitude they should go on strike as from the following Friday. Their main demands were:-

1. The reinstatement of the three dismissed workers.

2. The removal by promotion, demotion, transfer or anything else of the Area Manager to a position where he would no longer have any contact with or any authority over Allied Publishing's black workers.
3. The renegotiation of the grievance procedure which had recently been signed by the Parties. It was felt that this was necessary because the Company had not acted within the spirit of the agreement and it was clear that a number of new safeguards for the workers would have to be written in.

In addition, members of the Media Worker's Association of S.A. (MWASA) who were on strike had been holding their own meeting at the premises of "Post" newspaper and got word of what was happening. They sent some representatives to the Allied shop stewards meeting and asked for permission to address the workers. This was granted, and thereafter the shop stewards agreed to add to their list of demands that they were in sympathy with the MWASA strikers and that their grievances should be settled speedily. During the previous weeks, some Allied Publishing workers, especially those who worked in the black townships, had, in fact, come under pressure from some members of their community who felt it was not right that newspapers were being sold while the journalists were on strike.

During the course of the shop stewards meeting a phone call was received from Management saying that the three dismissed workers would be reinstated, but suspended from duty with full pay. However, at this stage this was felt to be an unsatisfactory solution especially given the alleged assaults by the Area Manager.

The following day was spent by shop stewards informing their colleagues of the decision which had been taken.

On the morning of Thursday 20th, after receiving a letter explaining the workers' demands, the Managing Director of Allied Publishing, telephoned Ms Mashinini and invited her to meet with him that day, to discuss the problem of the Area Manager. When she consulted with the shop stewards about this offer they said that she should not go since it was the prerogative of Management to remove the Area Manager, and this could be done without any discussion with Union officials.

Early on the Friday morning the strike began. It involved approximately 1700—1800 workers. As far as can be ascertained, the only workers who did not join the strike were three at the Pretoria depot and a few at the Edenvale depot. Such was the degree of organisation.

On the morning of Friday 21st, approximately 80 shop stewards met with the workers employed at the main Allied depot in Booysens, where the Company's Head Office is situated. Also present were a number of Union Officials and Executive Committee Members. Several rounds of talks between the shop stewards and officials and management did not lead to the resolution of the dispute. Management agreed to one demand only; the renegotiation of the grievance procedure. Apart from that, they agreed only to reinvestigate the dismissals and to look into the question of the Area Manager's conduct, with the possibility of participation

by Worker Representatives. Management also stated that they had no standing in the MWASA dispute (despite the fact that some Directors of Argus and S.A.A.N. are also Directors of Allied Publishing).

Then the results of the talks were reported back to the several hundred workers gathered at the depot, they were unanimous that the strike should continue. The shop stewards met again at the Union Offices on Saturday 22nd and decided that their demands should stand and that the strike should continue at least until Monday when Management would be asked to reconsider their uncompromising stand.

In the meantime management had been employing highly-paid scab labour to ensure the distribution of the newspapers. These included the clerical staff of some of the newspapers. In addition, armed white men were seen driving and being transported in Allied Publishing vehicles. Despite these efforts, the circulation of newspapers suffered severely during the four days of the strike. Another group of people that management tried to employ as scab labour were students at the University of the Witwatersrand. To their credit, however, members of the Students Representative Council refused to allow Allied to advertise for labour on the University premises.

On Monday morning the 24th, the Workers, shop stewards and Union officials again met at the Booyens depot. On arrival, the workers were handed letters from management saying that they would be dismissed if they did not return to work the following day. Upon hearing this, a small group of representatives went to management to hold talks. Mr Mitchell refused to talk to them. Apparently the matter had been taken out of his hands and was now in the hands of the Board of Directors. Communication was then conducted through the Transvaal Provincial Manager directly with the Chairman of the Company Mr H.W. Miller who is also a Director of Argus. Mr Miller refused to consider the unconditional reinstatement of the three workers and the immediate removal of the Area Manager. Assurances were made though, that upon the ending of the strike the promised investigations *would* take place with the participation of the shop stewards and Union officials.

This was reported back to the workers gathered at the depot. The meeting now included large numbers of Allied workers from other areas. After discussion they decided that given these developments i.e. threat of dismissal plus Mr Miller's undertaking, they would return to work the following day.

After the Strike

Since the strike the relationship between the Union and the Company has been very strained, and not all undertakings made during the strike have been adhered to. The workers main grievance has been resolved, although not in the way that was originally planned. While evidence against the Area Manager was still being collected by the Union for the investigation, workers reported that they had heard

rumours of his likely departure from the Company in the near future. This was confirmed in a letter to the Union from Allied management on the 9th December which stated that the Area Manager "... had accepted an appointment in Durban. He leaves our employ on December 15th".

There was much jubilation amongst the workers upon hearing that the rumour had been confirmed and any small doubts about the wisdom of the strike which may have existed were now totally dispelled.

However, the other aspect of the settlement has not yet been satisfactorily resolved. The following are extracts from a sworn statement made by one of the dismissed workers, Mr Norman Matshikiri, which explain the way in which management has conducted some of its affairs since the strike:—

"On the 25th November, the day the Allied workers returned to work after the strike, I also went back and reported to my complex manager. He told me that he did not want me to work for him. I then went to Head Office and met Mr Sithole, the Personnel Officer. Mr Sithole asked me to make a statement, but I refused to do so because I wanted the Union to be present. Mr Webster, the Assistant Provincial Manager then walked in to Mr Sithole's office. Mr Sithole told him who I was and that I had refused to make a statement without the Union's presence. Mr Webster invited me to his office and asked me why I was refusing to make a statement. I again explained that I wanted a Union official to be present while I was making a statement, because my case had already been reported to the Union.

Mr Webster then asked me to sign a piece of paper which he had written during our discussion, but I refused to do this. Mr Webster then said he was telephoning Mr Nemaakande the Venda Consul in charge of contract workers to ask him to talk to me. I refused to talk to Mr Nemaakande and again said I would only do these things if a Union official was present. Mr Webster then said he was phoning Ms Mashinini. He said to Ms Mashinini over the phone that I was refusing to give a statement. He told me that Ms Mashinini said I should give a statement. I still refused, and he then said that she had said I should be brought to her. I agreed to this. But Mr Webster then seemed reluctant to take me. I then said that I was hungry and without any money and that I was going to the Union and that Mr Webster could find me there later.

He then gave me R5,00 and said I should not worry about my job or money. I would have all that if I gave a short statement, and he also repeated that Ms Mashinini had said that I *should* give a short statement. Because he assured me that Ms Mashinini had said this I did give a short statement. The statement dealt with Mr Ndluli's accusation that I had carried unauthorised passengers in my vehicle."

The above should be read together with the following sworn statement made

by Ms. Mashinini:—

“I deny having received a telephone call from Mr Webster, Assistant Provincial Manager of Allied Publishing Limited on the 25th November, 1980, dealing with the case of Mr Norman Matshikiri. I did not receive such a telephone call and therefore could not have asked Mr Webster to tell Mr Matshikiri to give a statement.”

Continuing with Mr Matshikiri's sworn statement:—

“However, I did not *sign* this statement because I still wanted a Union official present. On that day and the next two days, the 26th and the 27th November, I was kept in Mr Webster's and Mr Wilson's offices and they also accompanied me from one office to another and also around the complex. I also almost always sleep at the Booyens checkpoint and did so those nights.

They were trying to be friendly to me. They kept on asking me, in a friendly way, about the Union and about my case. They wrote down my answers and many times asked me to sign what they had written. I did not sign any of these papers.

The hearing for my case was held on Friday 28th November. The previous day at about 3.30p.m. I had been told to attend and to bring shop stewards with me. I said I would not invite any unless the Union was also invited. I had not had an opportunity to go to the Union because ever since the previous Tuesday I had not been let out of the sight of Mr Wilson or Mr Webster during office hours. They had even accompanied me to the toilet. Mr Wilson then said that management would invite the shop stewards and the Union. I agreed to that because I would be satisfied if the Union was present.

On Friday 28th November the hearing was due to start at 9.30a.m. At 7.30a.m. I went to the checkpoint gate and waited for the Union officials and shop stewards to arrive. I saw a group of people from Albert Street, including Mr Ndluli, Mr. Moketsi, Mr Lenosi and Mr Lukoto, arrive. I also saw some Head Office management arrive. I remained outside, although it was past 9.30 a.m., because I was still awaiting the Union officials and other shop stewards. At about 9.45 a.m. Mr Webster came to me and said “the people have arrived” and that I should go to the offices with him.

I wanted to be certain that the people I wanted were present so I went into Mr Sithole's office and asked him. Mr Sithole said he didn't know because he had not been upstairs yet. Then Mr Webster walked in and told me to come upstairs with him.

I went with him upstairs and into the boardroom. I did not see the Union officials and shop stewards. As they were telling me about the procedure for the hearing through an interpreter I asked where were the shop stewards and Union

officials. Mr Wilson said that he had not invited them as he had promised. He asked me why I needed them because Mr Moketsi and Mr Lukoto were present. When I heard this I stood up to walk out, but Mr Wilson stopped me at the door and made me sit down again. I was then forced, against my will, to take part in the hearing. What surprised me is that during the hearing the accusation about me carrying unauthorised passengers in my vehicle was hardly discussed. Instead they discussed other matters, such as shortages, and also theft of which I had never heard before. Before this meeting in the boardroom I had never heard about any accusation that I am supposed to have stolen from a cafe. When I asked for proof of this, Mr Lenosi said he did not have any in writing. Mr Wilson also asked Mr Lenosi the same question. Mr Lenosi replied that he had given a verbal warning to me about the alleged theft. I denied ever having received any such warning. I was very angry because they had raised matters which I had not expected, and felt that the hearing was not being held in a fair way. The two shop stewards refused to comment when asked whether they were satisfied with the conduct of the hearing and with the decision to dismiss me."

At the hearing management decided that Mr Matshikiri was in fact, guilty of an offence and he was dismissed.

As far as the other two dismissed workers are concerned, the one did not report at all to the hearing called for him, and was dismissed. It appears that he no longer wishes to be employed by the Company. The other worker attended the hearing and thereafter was also dismissed. The Union intends to follow-up these cases at a meeting with management to be held during February. The Union was not invited to attend these latter two hearings.

Conclusion:

While the striking workers' demands were not fully met, this strike can nevertheless be seen as significant. Firstly, the Area Manager whom the workers had come to dislike is no longer employed by the Company. In fact, rumour has it that he had tendered his resignation while the strike was in progress, but was persuaded by management to withdraw it at that stage, as they did not wish to give the workers the impression that their strike had scored them a victory.

Secondly as the Union said in a Press statement after the strike:—

"The strike has shown management that the days when Black workers can be assaulted, abused and fired without reacting are long gone. The strike has shown that an assault on one worker is regarded as an assault on all. The strike also demonstrated the loyalty of the workers to the Union and to each other."

That this reflects the views of the workers is further proven by the fact that in the week following the strike approximately 50 Allied employees who were not yet members of the Union signed up.

The degree of organisation and discipline which existed amongst the strikers was one of the most impressive features of the strike. As has been mentioned, fewer than 10 of the approximately 1 700 employees refused to join the strike, and, contrary to claims by management, only one worker returned to work before the strike was officially ended.

Another interesting development is that in contrast to management's recent curt and hostile attitudes to the Union, they have tried to treat the workers in an unusually kind manner. 1980 Christmas bonuses were double those of 1979 (which more than made up for wage losses during the strike) and in addition workers were treated to lavish picnics and Christmas parties.

Workers are quite aware, though, that these actions by the Company are not disconnected with their recent strike and strong organisation within the Union.