



# Black bosses bash FEDCRAW

*LABOUR BULLETIN correspondent*

**S**izame-Releke Supermarket employees were locked-out in Dobsonville and Orlando after they staged a sit-in. Workers were demanding to know why a manager who was suspended from the company premises was allowed in, before an agreed meeting with their union was held.

In Mzamo-Moleko bottlestore, the workers' sit-in was sparked off when management unilaterally withdrew its contribution to the workers' medical aid scheme. The workers were locked out and replaced by new employees.

These two companies are directed by Mr Jacob Motlogeloa. He also owns the majority of shares. The companies operate stores in Soweto and Tembisa. The lock-outs took place in Diepkloof and Moletsane.

FEDCRAW is not organised in Tembisa, and workers in this branch continued working.

## The five month lock-out

When the lock-out at Sizame-Releke entered its second week, it took a new turn with attempts to assassinate some of the key shop stewards from both companies. For example one shop steward, Norman Pule, escaped death when he was missed by four shots fired from a car. Pule alleged that he saw Motlogeloa and the area manager at the centre of the Sizame-Releke dispute in the car. Pule also alleged that when he tried to lay charges of attempted murder against Motlogeloa and his colleague, the Orlando Police threatened him and five other shop stewards with intimidation charges if they went ahead with charges against Motlogeloa. Pule alleges that the police remarked: "What do they (shop stewards) think they are, to lay a charge against Bra Jackie?"

According to Pule the shop stewards were also taken to a policeman's house and advised to talk the matter over with Motlogeloa.

The union had to refer the matter to a lawyer, who applied for a court interdict preventing Motlogeloa from harming Pule or any shop steward involved in the dispute.

## Developments before the strike

The strike and the lock-outs at the two Afrosun Companies took place after FEDCRAW had organised workers and signed a recognition agreement with management. At first management was reluctant to sign. Pule remembers that the manager "tried to convince workers that the company is owned by blacks, who are brothers to black workers, and that there was no need for a trade union to be in the company. This argument did not have any bearing as management treated workers no differently from companies such as Score or Checkers."

After recognition at Mzamo-Moleko and Sizame-Releke, the union started taking up issues such as bad working conditions, unpaid overtime and proposed retrenchments.

At one stage management was assisted in negotiations by management from the white-owned chain store, Score. Then, in April this year, workers at Sizame-Releke alleged that an area manager was dictatorial. Management agreed to suspend him pending further discussions. When workers at Dobsonville saw the suspended manager in the store they

staged a sit in, which spread to the Orlando West store. According to the union, management then called the police, who forcibly evicted the strikers. One week later both supermarkets opened with new workers. The union argues that this is a lock-out.



*Sizame-Releke: business as usual, tho' workers are still out*

*Photo: Labour Bulletin*

## Other workers join the sit-in

FEDCRAW also faced a union busting strategy in Mzamo-Moleko bottlestore. Here the union members were locked out after they staged a sit-in. Workers staged a sit-in after management unilaterally withdrew its contribution to the workers' medical aid scheme. The sit-in lasted from 4 to 10 June, when management locked out all the striking workers. Workers alleged police were present to back up the lock out.



*FEDCRAW shop-steward discussing with dismissed workers*

*Photo: Labour Bulletin*

## **Lessons for the union**

Union organiser, Molekane explains the union has learned important lessons about black business from the strike. He believes that a black employer class is developing at a rapid speed in Soweto. "This class of employers is not different from the white capitalist, they are all out to exploit workers in the township while hiding behind progressive political rhetoric. Their major objective is to fulfil the aspiration of becoming the Tony Factors or Raymond Ackermans of tomorrow," he said.

## **Conclusion**

The fate of the strike by FEDCRAW members is still to be determined by the Industrial Court in early November.

In the meantime management has been able to continue business without any problems. Management was able to do this both because it was able to employ unorganised workers, and because it could rely on police intervention if strikers attempted to picket the stores.

The strikes are an indication of the alliance businessmen can develop with the state or its functionaries to crush worker organisation. Sizame-Releke management's unitarist approach failed to convince workers that they were their black brothers, and that there was no need for a union. Once that had failed, management mounted an open attack against workers and their leadership.

The alleged assassination attempt adds a nasty twist to the relations between black bosses and their "brother" workers.

The relationship between the company director, Motlogeloa and the local black policemen also raises the question about how some state officials view working people in our community. The policemen tried to stop the shop stewards from laying an attempted murder charge against the company director on the basis that "Mr Motlogeloa belongs to the highest class in the community and a case cannot be opened against him." While this does not explain much about the relationship between Motlogeloa and these policemen, it suggests that some middle class figures are free to do as they please with people of a working class background. ☆

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## **STOP PRESS**

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**I**t seems that FEDCRAW is not the only problem that Jackie Motlogeloa is facing. Finance Week (November 10 - 16) says that he is in serious *danger of going bankrupt*.

He operates the Orlando West shopping centre in which many of the shops have closed down. His own Mzamo-Moleko bottle store and A-Train disco are apparently in danger of closing down as well. Nor is his supermarket doing very well.

FEDCRAW members cannot be feeling too much sympathy for him, especially as they face possible starvation as a result of management practices at his shops. ☆

# **CWIU takes the struggle out to sea - industrial court rules this out of order**

by *MARTIN JANSEN*,  
CWIU Petroleum co-ordinator

**T**he French-controlled company, Sopelog, has a contract with the South African government to operate about three oilrigs searching for oil beneath the sea off the coast of South Africa.

The union first started organising at Sopelog in 1986, when many of the workers approached the Cape Town offices seeking assistance.

By mid-1987 the union had recruited about 95 workers out of the 200 eligible for union membership. The union then made several approaches to management for recognition. The management, led by a Frenchman, Mr Michelle Dudonet, was totally unprepared and therefore crude in their dealings with the CWIU. The harsh working conditions for all workers on board oilrigs can-