Rand Daily Mail, Pretoria – a bleak return to life and order, May 23, 1983

Nedbank employees and their spouses rallied to the scene of destruction yesterday, helping to clear away rubble. From left are Mrs Hannetjie Havinga, Mr Aible Saayman, Mrs Wilna Spyilerman, Mrs Doreen Saayman and Mr Des Havinga.

Pretoria — a bleak return to life and order

A desolate scene on Pretoria's Church Street West yesterday. A stretcher used for bomb blast victims lies inside Woolworths, surrounded by broken glass.

Trucks begin unloading materials to replace Nedbank's shattered facade on Pretoria's Church Street West while police continued to patrol the area yesterday.

Tough bargaining test for key industries as showdowns loom

Labour Week
By
STEVEN FRIEDMAN

TWO potential showdowns — both with implications for the future of bargaining in key industries — are due to take shape this week.

In the metal industries, unions and employers meet tomorrow to continue annual wage negotiations.

Employer federation Seifsa has now made an offer to unions after first pushing for a wage freeze. It has offered 3% to those at the top of the scale and 5% to those at the bottom.

But artisan unions on the council label this an "insult" and may declare a dispute with Seifsa. This would delay a settlement, but there should be an accord sooner or later.

What gives the negotiations more long-lasting import is the fact that Fosatu's Metal and Allied Workers Union is taking part for the first time, though its application to join the council hasn't been accepted yet.

Its participation, the first involvement by Fosatu's biggest union in metal's official bargaining system, is a key pointer to the future.

It is firstly a test of the council's ability to meet black worker aspirations.

But it is also a test for the union. Having taken a controversial tactical decision to join the council, it will now have to show that this can pay off.

MAWU members were due to meet at the weekend to discuss their stance at the talks. But the union's stated policy is to accept not less than a R2-an-hour minimum wage ... and the present metal minimum is R1,42.

So with employers determined to keep rises to a minimum, there is no chance of a wage accord between MAWU and Seifsa.

In the current economic climate, there is also little chance of strikes by MAWU members on the wage issue.

The union may simply react by issuing angry statements — but the negotiations provide a first crucial test of its role on the council.

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THE other key industry where the next week or two should be vital is the mines.

If a recognition agreement between the Chamber of Mines and Cusa's National Union of Mineworkers is signed soon, NUM will this year become the first union to negotiate black mine wages with the Chamber.

Last week it called on the Chamber to sign this week so that wage talks could commence at the beginning of next month.

The agreement seems set to be signed on time, but the real crunch may come if and when talks begin.

There could be few worse years to begin a new era of black mine wage negotiation. The Chamber, having settled on an 8% rise with white miners, is hardly likely to offer much more to black workers.

But last week's NUM statement implied that the union is likely to enter the talks with tough demands.

It wants wage rises to compensate black miners not only for cost of living rises, but also for the backlog created in the decades in which the Chamber set wages on its own.

It has also compiled wide-ranging "non-economic priorities" — improved health and safety standards, increased training in non-craft jobs, disciplinary procedures and so on.

These include a threat to take employers to the industrial court for allegedly using black workers in jobs reserved for whites and not paying them accordingly.

In one sense, these demands are not surprising. There is clearly a backlog of stored-up grievances among black miners and the advent of unions like NUM has raised their belief that these can now be remedied.

But will NUM push for many of these demands to be met now and thus risk an early confrontation with the Chamber? If so, it will face a stern test within a year of being formed which could end in an early setback.

And will the Chamber be willing to accommodate some grievances now in the interests of a long-term bargaining relationship with NUM? If not, the new era of labour reform on the mines could turn sour quickly.

So the credibility of both sides will be at stake.

CISKEI's war against the black workforce continues apace.

Now its Manpower Minister wants "disciplinary camps" run on military lines to be used against migrants who break their contracts "without good reason".

Free market theorists might have qualms about military detention camps as a punishment for people who don't like their jobs. Not so the Cape Chamber of Industries, whose director has more or less backed the move.

For its part, Pretoria has always denied charges that it is responsible for Ciskeian government actions.

But it must be convenient to have a "foreign government" which can always be counted on to crack down on workers.

And Pretoria might find it difficult to evade responsibility for the fact that Ciskei has only one export — migrant workers — and that this idea is presumably designed to make that export more attractive to potential buyers.

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ACCORDING to the Department of Manpower, there have been only 25 strikes in the first few months of this year, compared to 72 for the same period last year.

If the figures are correct — and there are those who dispute them — the chief reason is clearly the recession, not the success of official dispute-settling machinery, as some officials argue.

On the other hand, the official industrial court must have also played a role in reducing strikes by giving unions an alternative to suggest to members.

And, while logic suggests a drop in strikes throughout the year, don't bank on it. Black worker action is still highly unpredictable.

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